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Being Dogla
Hybridity and Ethnicity in Post-Colonial
Suriname

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PhD in Social Anthropology
University of Edinburgh
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Declaration

I declare that that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. Part of the historical and political background information in Chapter One and parts of an earlier version of Chapter Two will appear in a forthcoming publication (Marchand 2014), and an ethnographic vignette in Chapter Four appears in a previous publication (Marchand 2012), but the text has been adapted and updated for this thesis. Text that has been used elsewhere has been referenced as such, and with its sources appearing in the bibliography.

Signed:

Date:

For my mother,
Chantal Bosch

Abstract

This thesis explores hybridity and ethnicity in Nickerie, Western Suriname. It undertakes this exploration from the perspective of *doglas*, Surinamese people with mixed African and Asian parentage. In Suriname's postcolonial process of nation-building, ethnicity has been essentialized, with *doglas* representing a category of anomaly, but also of uncertainty. What I have termed 'dogla discourse' refers to the opinions, experiences and negotiations among and about *doglas* in Nickerie that both shored up and destabilized Suriname's ethnic essentialism. Dogla discourse fuses and confuses ethnic categories and boundaries in its insistent hybridity. The thesis shows that being dogla does not simply align with common tropes of 'mixed-race'. I argue that in embracing conflicting paradigms of ethnicity, *doglas* in Nickerie both emphasized and undermined ethnic essentialism. This was expressed in idioms of kinship and sexual relations, in notions of the pure/impure dogla body, and in the relevance and irrelevance of 'cultural spirituality'. Furthermore, dogla discourse problematized the role of ethnicity in the enduring struggles of how to define 'the national' in postcolonial states. Thus, the thesis presents an ethnographic contribution to studies of 'mixed-race' in contexts of postcolonial nation-building, and theoretically expands conceptualizations of 'the hybrid'.

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Acronyms

ABOP	<i>Algemene Bevrijdings- en Ontwikkelings Partij</i> (General Liberation and Development Party)
ABS	<i>Algemeen Bureau voor de Statistiek</i> (General Bureau of Statistics)
ADRON	<i>Anne van Dijk Rijst Onderzoekscentrum Nickerie</i> (Anne van Dijk Rice Research Centre Nickerie)
CCN	<i>Cultureel Centrum Nickerie</i> (Cultural Centre Nickerie)
DNP	<i>De Nationale Assemblée</i> (The National Assembly)
DOE	<i>Democratie door Ontwikkeling en Eenheid</i> (Democracy through Development and Unity)
DSB	<i>De Surinaamsche Bank</i> (The Surinamese Bank)
GIS	Geographical Information System
GLIS	<i>Grondregistratie en Land Informatie Systeem</i> (Ground registration and Land Information System)
IOL	<i>Instituut voor de Opleiding der Leraren</i> (Institute for the Education of Teachers)
KTPi	<i>Kaum Tani Persatuan Indonesia</i> (Indonesian Peasant Party)
MC	<i>Mega Combinatie</i> (Mega Combination)
NDP	<i>Nationale Democratische Partij</i> (National Democratic Party)
NF	<i>Nieuw Front</i> (New Front)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPS	<i>Nationale Partij Suriname</i> (National Party Suriname)
NS	<i>Nieuw Suriname</i> (New Suriname)
NTC	Nickerie Tennis Club
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PL	<i>Pertjajah Luhur</i> ('Exalted Faith' Party)
PMU-GLIS	Project Management Unit – GLIS (see acronym above)
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SPA	<i>Surinaamse Partij van de Arbeid</i> (Surinamese Labour Party)
SZN	<i>Streekziekenhuis Nickerie</i> (Regional Hospital Nickerie)
VA	<i>Volksalliantie</i> (People's Alliance)
VHP	<i>Vooruitstrevende Hervormingspartij</i> (Progressive Reform Party)
VVV	<i>Verenigde Volks Vergadering</i> (United People Meeting)
WIN	<i>Welzijnsinstituut Nickerie</i> (Welfare Institute Nickerie)

Note on the Text

Throughout this thesis I use double quotation marks when citing people directly, both from the field and in the literature; both serve as informants to this thesis, whether empirically or conceptually. I use single quotation marks stylistically, to draw attention to ironic or unusual terms, and analytically when introducing terminology that is uncommon in anthropological vocabulary (such as ‘dogla discourse’, see below). As discussed later, the fieldwork was carried out mainly in Dutch. Direct quotes of people in Nickerie *and* quotes of literature in the Dutch language are translated by me from Dutch to English, unless otherwise stated. The Dutch original is added in italics (and in parentheses) where it concerns unusual or specifically local expressions, or where this is necessary empirical evidence rather than mere translation. Italics are also used for English words or phrases where I want to emphasize these.

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Introduction

She looked beautiful, dressed in a bluish green sari and a silvery sparkling see-through shawl draped over her shoulder. Her softly curling hair waved along with the sari when she moved. My Hindustani friend Varsha asked me if I wanted to interview Ketty: “She wears a sari but she is not Hindustani. She is dogla.” ‘Dogla’ was the local term for people with mixed African and Asian parentage. We were standing around one of the high plastic tables during the official opening of the Nickerie Tennis Club (NTC). The newly refurbished, multifunctional Nickerian ‘paradise’ for tennis- and swim-lovers was also a popular venue for children’s parties, salsa evenings, educational meetings, and social encounters more generally.

I interviewed Ketty a few weeks later. She was at the NTC’s official opening because her husband was in the sport commission. I commented on the sari she had been wearing that evening, to which she replied:

I also enjoy wearing a *koti* (Creole dress) with or without *angisa* (Creole headscarf). I can wear a *pangi* (Maroon loincloth), a Javanese sarong, a Chinese dress too. I am lucky to be dogla. I can wear any dress I like because I am not really ethnic (*ik ben niet echt etnisch*). In Suriname every ethnic group has their own cultural dress. My choice of clothing is not ethnic, because doglas are not really ethnic. I don’t normally describe myself as mixed (*gemengd*) but in Nickerie everywhere I go I am told that I am. Hindustanis tell me that they can see that my mother is Hindustani because I have coolie feet and slender build. I don’t have the muscular Creole thighs and calves, but people in Nickerie recognize Creole race (*ras*) in my face and my hair – that is the first thing they look at, dogla hair. My mother raised me and my siblings like Creoles because she was fed-up with her family’s narrow-mindedness about ethnicity (*hokjesdenken*). Despite Creoles being ethnic (*Creolen zijn dan wel etnisch*), they are less concerned with ethnic mixing between the groups. Unlike Hindustanis, Creoles are quite tolerant towards doglas, towards people who are not really ethnic.

Why did Ketty distinguish between people who were “ethnic” and, with reference to herself, doglas who were “not really ethnic”? It was a distinction that was commonly made in Nickerie. To me, this distinction pointed towards two things: first, that there was something “really ethnic” in Nickerie (that was *not* dogla); and second, that

there was a reason doglas did not fit that “really ethnic” framework. The first point led me to understand Nickerian conceptualizations of ethnicity, initially at least, in terms of ethnic essentialism; ‘ethnic people’ in Nickerie were grouped and opposed to one another along primordial, fixed lines of descent. Doglas, in that essentialist explanation, were simply mixed.

The second point was more complicated, involving questions beyond categorical conceptualizations alone. What made doglas stand out from everyone else? Why were they not really ethnic in an otherwise ethnically deterministic system of social categorization? If doglas could transcend an essentialist system of ethnic categorization, then what did this transcendence say about that system? Were doglas the “constitutive outside” (Butler 1993) through which the system sustained itself? These questions have directed the main themes in this thesis, both ethnographically and in the theoretical argument it makes. Focusing on reasons that doglas were not really ethnic, I asked how ethnicity was experienced and talked about in Nickerie, and how we can understand that experience and way of talking within the larger history of colonial and postcolonial Suriname.

In this thesis I question categorizations of ethnicity both as practical and analytical reifications. With the term ‘reification’, I refer to what Gerd Baumann describes as “thingification, or turning concepts into things” (1999: 63). Quoting Berger and Luckmann (1967: 106), Baumann (ibid.) clarified: “Reification is the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things ... the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something other than human products – such as facts of nature”. In Nickerie, the concept of ethnicity seemed reified as a ‘truth’ in which doglas represented a category of anomaly, but also of uncertainty.

Doglas were portrayed as people who could not be reified into an ethnic group, whilst living amidst people who felt the need to reify ethnic group existence. In this reification process, however, mixed-race was reified no less than race. Both as analytical and practical category, ‘being dogla’ implies a high level of conceptual purity, if not essentialism; ‘dogla’ was not a vague, indefinite term, but referred to

people who were attributed a mixed-ness which can only exist if there is also a term for people who were understood *not* to be mixed. In other words, the dogla category is built on particular, delineated, ethnicized referents that it can “not really” possess. I will argue that doglas thus both problematized and confirmed an essentialist way of ethnic thinking in Suriname. They both denied and reinforced ethnic categories.

My ethnography will show that in Nickerie ethnicity was understood partly as a ‘thing’, or a noun, as something that can *be*. Ethnicity was discursively deployed as a noun, but also, often interchangeably, as an adjective, as expressed in people’s description of, for instance, “ethnic food” (*etnisch eten*) or “ethnic spirits” (*etnische geesten*). The phrase “being ethnic” – used by people in Nickerie – suggested stability in ‘the ethnic’ as a practical category, as a locally reified noun in daily speech rather than a conceptual representation. It also implied a quality or an understanding of ethnicity that could not be reduced to a ‘thing’, but existed on a spectrum of more or less, of “really” or “not really”. This particular linguistic use of ethnicity in Nickerie was explicitly addressed in people’s explanations of what it meant to be dogla or – in analytical terms – ‘the hybrid’.

In this thesis I try to make analytic sense of the ethnographic interplay between ethnic reifications (essentializations) and deconstructions thereof, using a concept I have described as ‘dogla discourse’. Dogla discourse concerns opinions, experiences and negotiations among and about doglas in Nickerie that both accentuated and denied ethnic essentialism. The term ‘discourse’ here refers both to speech and behaviour (see also Baumann 1999). It contains what people talked about, how they said it and in which context. More specifically, with ‘dogla discourse’ I am referring both to what doglas said about being dogla, and to what people in Nickerie said about doglas in the context of Suriname’s ethnicized social relations. It is not only a linguistic discourse but also contains the attitudes and reservations people expressed towards and against each other. My addition of ‘dogla’ reflects the recurring emphasis on the simultaneous fixity and fluidity of ethnic boundaries in that discourse. Dogla discourse serves as an analytical device that ties together the complex web of often contradictory messages regarding hybridity and ethnicity as

communicated in Nickerie. Being an analytical tool, ‘dogla discourse’ was not a locally known or used term. Its premise, however, and the argument it frames, stems from direct observation of people’s daily conduct in Nickerie.

Dogla discourse, then, is a discourse of ethnicity and hybridity used by and about doglas in Nickerie that serves as my analytical entry point to discussion of the ways that people experienced and talked about essentialist ethnic categorization and its deconstruction. I will show how dogla discourse presented ethnicity and hybridity not only as contrasting frameworks, but as each other’s dialogic partner. The dogla category functioned as the boundary with which that dialogic interaction could take place. In other words, the conceptual distinctions anthropologists make between essentialism and constructivism, and the practical distinctions people in Nickerie made between ‘the ethnic’ (as “really ethnic”) and ‘the hybrid’ (as “not really ethnic”), only make sense in relation to each other. Doglas were the junction where constructivist and essentialist voices could meet, shape and multiply the discourse (Bakhtin 1981), by emphasizing both ethnicity and hybridity.

What this thesis attempts to show is that being dogla does not simply align with common tropes of mixed-race. The chapters in Part I of the thesis engage with colonial history as a comment on how ethnic categorization came into being in Suriname, and on the enduring yet often overlooked struggles over defining ‘the national’ in a postcolonial state such as Suriname. People in Nickerie made reference to rooted-ness and spatial belonging in a postcolonial setting in the Americas in which almost ninety percent of the population self-identified as descendants of former African slaves and Asian indentured labourers (ABS 2005). In other words, ethnic and hybrid identifications in Nickerie were not simply about difference but about redefinitions of spatial belonging, forms of power, culture and personhood that were built on ‘old’ and diverging memories of immigrants, but reconfigured in a newly ‘shared’ locality, with colonial baggage that was not easily left behind.

Dogla discourse is more than an analytical tool to discuss ethnic boundary negotiations. It reflects ways in which ethnic essentialism was experienced as ‘real’

in a postcolonial context of nation-building. My ethnography in Part II of the thesis represents a lived reality of belonging and non-belonging for people referred to as 'dogla'. The experiences of doglas were not simply cognitive meta-narratives distinguishing purity and impurity, but were real, suffered, overcome, yet also reproduced. In dealing with conflicting paradigms of ethnicity, doglas both emphasized and negated stereotypes in idioms of kinship and sexual relations; in complex notions of the pure/impure dogla body; and in the relevance and irrelevance attributed to exclusionary categorizations of 'cultural spirituality'. My thesis aims to make an ethnographic contribution to studies of ethnicity in contexts of postcolonial nation-building, and to present a critical discussion of conceptualizations of 'the hybrid' in multicultural communities more generally.

The thesis draws upon fifteen months of fieldwork in Nickerie, a predominantly Hindustani district in Western Suriname (see Figure 1). Nickerie is a small rural place in the sense that it is hardly known beyond its own boundaries. Yet Nickerie is not a small place in terms of ethnicity. It is a place in which ethnic categories are explicitly questioned and thereby constantly called upon. In the face of hybridity – particularly the mixing between Asian and African people – people in Nickerie both blur and maintain ethnic difference. This dichotomy frames my thesis.

My interest in Nickerie as a field site was triggered during a meeting I had with Anouk de Koning and Hebe Verrest in the summer of 2008. When I first met them Anouk and Hebe were affiliated to the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (*Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*; KITLV) in Leiden, the Netherlands. Both of them had been in Suriname multiple times and written several academic accounts of its people and society. I told Anouk and Hebe that I had not yet decided on an exact field site. I felt hesitant to stay in Paramaribo, reasoning that the predominantly Creole capital might not be the best location for learning to understand how doglas were problematized by people opposing interethnic mixture.

Figure 1: Map of Suriname



Source: Adapted from Tjon Sie Fat (2009: 417) – with additional labels

Hebe and Anouk immediately pointed to Nickerie as a place that has been much neglected by anthropologists, geographers, and other social and political scientists. According to Hebe, scholars perhaps too easily link ethnic questions in Suriname – and in the Caribbean more generally – to blackness, Africanness. Anouk agreed, adding that scholars therefore risk equating Suriname to Paramaribo alone, neglecting the different experiences of people residing in the districts. In my reflections of this meeting, I decided on Nickerie as the best research location for my questions about the dogla experience and people’s perceptions of doglas. Rather than reiterating theories of Creole ideas *for* mixing, Nickerie could allow me to pay close

attention to presumed Hindustani ideas *against* inter-ethnic mixing – ideas that had become crucial in ideological definitions of the nation in twentieth century Suriname.

In Suriname, as well as in its Caribbean neighbours Guyana and Trinidad, descendents of African slaves and Asian indentured labourers came to oppose each other both in cultural and political terms. As relative newcomers to the Americas, these people were not only confronted with European colonial domination, *but also with each other*. In Suriname, Creole elite in the capital city of Paramaribo had assumed state power in the country's twentieth century movement towards independence. These Creole elite were most notably challenged by a Hindustani consciousness that emerged through influential people from the rural rice producing district of Nickerie. The confrontation between Creoles and Hindustanis has had far-reaching consequences for the role ethnicity – and hybridity – has come to play in Suriname's colonial and postcolonial nation-building project (Buddingh' 2012; Budike and Mungra 1986; Khemradj 2002).

As I will show with further historical detail in Chapter One, colonially formed hierarchies of power and culture were defined and redefined along axes of ethnicity. From the seventeenth through twentieth centuries, the Dutch colonial plantation economy – with its brutal slave trade and its subsequent policy of indentured labour – rewrote the demographic map of Suriname (Oostindie 2000). Unable to press the indigenous (Amerindian) populations into slave labour because of their strong defence, Dutch colonial administrations – in need of labour for their 'plantocracy' – imported large numbers of enslaved people from Western Africa and indentured labourers from Hindustan (India), Java and China. At the same time, the colony attracted Dutch, British, Portuguese, Syrian and Lebanese entrepreneurs (Buddingh' 2012; Budike and Mungra 1986; Helman 1995 [1983]; Oostindie 2000).

More recently, people from newly independent Caribbean states such as Guyana and Haiti, as well as large groups of Brazilians and waves of "new Chinese", have been immigrating to Suriname in search of economic opportunities (Oostindie 2000; Snijders 2000; Tjon Sie Fat 2009). Although the colonial Chinese immigrants long

identified themselves as “the Chinese”, there has recently been a differentiation between “Surinamese Chinese” (claiming ancestry from indentured labourers immigrating to Suriname in the mid-nineteenth century) and “New Chinese” (new migrants from China arriving in Suriname since the early 1990s) (Tjon Sie Fat 2009).

When I was in Nickerie the Surinamese population was estimated at around half a million people – half of whom resided in the capital, Paramaribo, and around 36,500 of whom lived in Nickerie (of whom 13,800 were in the district’s main town, Nieuw Nickerie; numbers based on the country’s Census of 2004, see ABS 2005). The country’s four largest ethnic groups were Hindustani, Creole, Maroon and Javanese (ABS 2005) – “whites” have never been numerically dominant in Suriname (van Tuyl 2001: 221), see Figure 2.

As I will explain with more detail in Chapter 1, both Creoles and Maroons trace ancestry to former African slaves. The Surinamese distinction between these groups is that the ancestors of Maroons fled from the colonial plantations in protest against slavery. The runaway slaves developed isolated communities in the country’s interior. Creoles are contrasted to Maroons in their identification as descendents of African slaves who remained on the plantations and who developed closer relations with white slave owners. Since the abolition of slavery Creoles have mainly resided in the city and coastal areas (Hoefte 2001).

Figure 2: Table of the Ethnic Composition of the Surinamese Population

<i>Ethnic group</i>	<i>Percentage of total</i>
Hindustani	27.4
Creole	17.7
Maroons	14.7
Javanese	14.6
Mixed	12.5
Others	6.5
Unknown	6.6

Source: ABS (2005)

As this table shows, there were no official figures for doglas. Dogla was not a recognized ethnic category in the national Census. There was a category labelled “mixed” (*gemengd*), however, estimated at 12.5 per cent of the total population, and distinguished from “Creole”. Gert Oostindie observed that the number of mixed Surinamese people has been growing, but slowly (2000: 120). The category “others” (*overig*) incorporated Amerindians (3 per cent), Chinese (2 per cent), Lebanese, Guyanese, Dutch and more (1 per cent). A fairly large percentage of “unknown” (*onbekend*) was attributed to missing data. Outwith the official statistics, there were illegal immigrants, most notably Brazilians mining in the country’s interior (and, in Nickerie, illegal female Brazilian immigrants were equated with sex workers). According to Armand Snijders, “no country in the world with so few inhabitants, has people of so many different origins, as Suriname” (2000: 25).

Below, I turn to the theoretical framework my study is embedded in. In this framework I engage with academic literature on ethnicity, race and hybridity that is relevant to my case study of doglas in Suriname. The review of the literature starts with my understanding of the concept of ethnicity. I then look at race and race-mixing in the colonial period and consider nationalist ideologies of hybridity in the late colonial and postcolonial Americas. Funneling into the Caribbean more specifically, I next discuss the dogla literature, with an emphasis on Shalini Puri’s work on Caribbean hybridity. My thesis largely builds on the important works of Puri, Sarah England and Rhoda Reddock on douglarization in Trinidad, and Loraine van Tuyl’s study of doglas in Suriname. Furthermore, in the last paragraph of the theoretical framework I will explain how my conceptualization of Nickerie’s ‘dogla discourse’ is inspired by but also diverges from Gerd Baumann’s idea of “dual discursive competence”.

Following the Theoretical Framework, I will reflect on my fieldwork methodology. I conclude the Introduction with a brief outline of the thesis structure.

Theoretical Framework

The Concept of Ethnicity

Anthony Smith (1981) has explained ethnicity as a politicized form of group identity construction based on land of origin, cultural heritage, often language and physical looks, sometimes religious and family practices, and other group-bound habits. Smith's definition of *ethnie*, or ethnic community, is that it refers to "a social group whose members share a sense of common origins, claim a common and distinctive history and destiny, possess one or more distinctive characteristics, and feel a sense of collective uniqueness and solidarity" (ibid. 66; see also Weber 1961). Above all, however, ethnicity is a societal category of group differentiation, a relational distinction of us-versus-them, of boundaries (Baumann 1996, 1999; Cohen 1978; Eriksen 1993, 1998; Lamont and Molnár 2002; Riggs 1994). As Pnina Werbner observed with reference to Pakistani immigrants to Britain "who came as strangers to each other [but] chose to make gestures of identification and proximity" (1996: 68):

The term community, like nation or caste, is one of those words that make sense systemically, as part of a semantic field of differences. It is a relational word. A nation only exists in a family of nations. A caste only exists in a hierarchy of castes. And ethnic community as a localized collectivity sharing a common identity, only exists as part of a multi-ethnic segmentary system of overlapping and nesting relations of identity. (ibid. 71)

Any discussion of constructivist approaches to ethnicity must engage with the work of Fredrik Barth, whose scholarship on ethnicity was groundbreaking. According to Barth (1969), ethnicity is about the boundary formations of social groups rather than about cultural content. Boundaries are drawn through a group's self-definition and through ascriptions by actors outside this group. He explained ethnic boundary changes as being influenced both by external factors, such as competition over environmental or other resources between or within social groups; and by internal factors, such as the emergence of new elites in social groups functioning as agents of change. Barth's approach opened up a new way of looking at ethnic groups as socially constructed categorizations rather than fixed entities, more realistically

representing the actually blurry boundaries of ethnic demarcations that are often depicted as static by popular media and political institutions.

Barth's distinction between understanding ethnicity through a focus on 'culture', or through social processes of differentiation, is crucial to the conceptual framework in which my discussion of dogla discourse in Nickerie is embedded. When people in Nickerie were starkly presented as "being ethnic" or "not really ethnic", categorized in seemingly factual categories of "this is what people are like", then a process of social boundary-making was at work. Doglas were sitting exactly at that point where boundary-making was happening. Through looking at doglas, we can start to understand ethnicity not only as a matter of cultural difference per se, but as a social process of ethnic differentiation of the sort Barth has highlighted in his work. In dogla discourse however, an understanding of ethnicity as boundary-making did not cancel out ethnic essentialism in favour of constructivism; instead, as I will argue, it brought these 'alternatives' in close contact, not as oppositional but as interdependent conceptualizations of ethnicity.

An essentialist vision takes social concepts to exist as facts. Essentialists regard ethnicity as a given – a static, natural phenomenon rooted deeply in history and based on ascriptive characteristics such as blood type, physical appearance, dress, descent, religion and language (see Geertz 1973; Isaacs 1975). Constructivist, 'processual' views of ethnicity emphasize the social flexibility, historical contingencies and other path-dependent aspects of social phenomena. Griffioen and Tennekes (2002), for instance, argue that the boundaries of ethnic identities depend on context-specific levels of societal frustrations, ambitions, power-imbalances and personal or group interests.

Whereas essentialist uses of ethnicity may in some cases enhance the political or socio-economic status of cultural groups, as through "politics of recognition" (see Taylor 1994), reification of ethnicity is also prone to instigate conflict, or even war. Rogers Brubaker (1996), for instance, discusses the danger of reifying nationhood in his study on the violent return of nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe, an

ideology that was thought to have been transcended with the promise of a European Union in 1991. Whereas social constructions are deeply implicated in the ways in which people come to understand themselves and the world, “[t]o understand nationalism, we have to understand the practical uses of the category ‘nation’, the ways in which it can come to structure perception, to inform thought and experience, to organize discourse and political action” (ibid. 7). Brubaker’s point regarding nationalism can theoretically be extended to ethnicity, culture, and race, if not any social categories in their “practical uses”.

Ethnic identity, then, is flexible in that its markers and boundaries can be transformed in some contexts, though it can also be interpreted in an essentialist manner by people who understand themselves to be part of a cultural or political group explicitly distinct from other groups in society. In this latter sense, the in/exclusionary or us-versus-them form of ethnicity may take an instrumental character in that groups can categorize themselves – or be categorized – against each other for political, economic, or other strategic ends (Eriksen 1993, 1998; Riggs 1994). Such instrumentalization requires a communal sense of a group’s authenticity or purity. As Brackette Williams puts it: “In constructing boundaries between groups based on categorical identities and their links between these boundaries to cultural systems in nation-states, humans create purity out of impurity” (1989: 429).

Bruno Latour (1993) agrees that a hybrid world invites the invention of pure categories but asserts, moreover, that, pure and not-pure cannot exist without each other because “the more we forbid ourselves to conceive of hybrids, the more possible their interbreeding becomes” (1993: 12). Latour’s premise here is important to my argument because it points to the interaction of seemingly opposing concepts. As I will elaborate further in the Conclusions of this thesis, ideas of purity versus impurity, and likewise our concepts of ethnic essentialism and hybridity, shape each other in dialogic relation. My use of “dialogism” in understanding ethnicity and hybridity in Nickerie stems from Mikhail Bakhtin’s essays on *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981; see also Bakhtin 1984). A thorough engagement with Bakhtin’s argument and complex linguistic terminology is not within the scope of this thesis,

but his concept of “dialogism” is a very useful means of interpreting Nickerie’s dogla discourse.

In his skilful explanation of “discourse in the novel”, Bakhtin posits that:

one may speak of another’s discourse only with the help of that alien discourse itself, although in the process, it is true, the speaker introduces into the other’s words his own intentions and highlights the context of those words in his own way (1981: 355).

This “dialogized transmission of [discourse]” (ibid.) has been extended widely beyond the study of language by scholars who have applied Bakhtin’s ideas to the study of human interactions more generally. I use his concept of “dialogism” with reference to the seemingly opposing concepts of ethnicity and hybridity (and of essentialism and constructivism). These concepts are not simply oppositional, but can also *only* be understood in relation to one another – indeed, in their dialogic interaction. In other words, I suggest that ethnic essentialism and hybridity are not opposing discourses but dialogic “voices” in a single contextual discourse (which I have termed ‘dogla discourse’ in the case of Nickerie); voices that constantly strengthen and undermine themselves in their dialogic interaction.¹

In sum, this thesis follows Fredrik Barth’s definition of ethnicity as being about “the ethnic boundary that defines the group rather than the cultural stuff it encloses” (1969: 15). I embrace his emphasis on boundaries and in the following chapters will attend to how boundaries were crossed but also affirmed in Nickerie. The ‘interstices’ that both distinguished those boundaries and transgressed them, lie at the heart of why ethnicity and hybridity mattered in Nickerie. In this regard I am particularly taken with the important work of Ann Stoler, which – as she explains in her 1995 “[P]Refacing” of her first book about colonial Sumatra’s people living “*In the Company’s Shadow*” (1995a: xviii) – concerns:

¹ Bakhtin (1981) differentiates “single-voiced” and “double-voiced” discourse as pertaining to poetry and to prose, respectively. My reference to “voices” here rather concerns the arguments for and against ethnic essentialism raised by people in Nickerie – voices that constantly shifted the intonation of dogla discourse.

the contradictions inherent in taxonomies that, from the moment they are produced, generate the very categories they were designed to avoid. Focus on the interstitial and ambiguous underscores the fluidity and fixity with which distinctions are drawn, what we take to be evidence of where we and others rightfully belong. (ibid. xxvi)

Here, my interest in ethnic boundaries departs from Barth's (1969) work, and seeks to extend it by questioning the concept of the boundary itself. Specifically, I explore whether doglas may *be* the boundary that defines Hindustani and Creole groups in Suriname. More generally, this thesis concerns the ambiguity in Nickerie's dogla discourse in which ethnicity and race have been both essentialized and fuzzy categories of identification within a process of defining nationhood. In other words, dogla discourse both emphasizes and blurs the ethnic boundary between Hindustanis and Creoles. As I will show in this thesis, the primary definition of this boundary – whether in its fluid or fixed form – rests on a highly complex racialized discourse. Below, I will first present an introduction to the concept of race, before moving onto a more focused discussion of hybridity as race-mixing.

The Concept of Race

The centuries of the slave trade in the Americas, and European colonial expansion more generally, aligned neatly with the era of scientific racism. Early social Darwinist and eugenicist thinkers classified humans as distinct races or racial types based on their physical shapes and colours. Moreover, they attributed races with different behaviour and moral character, and thus, according to the logic of the time, relative social worth (see Poole 1997; Stepan 1991; Schwarz 1993). Racist thinking suited European colonists by shoring up the authority they needed for political and economic expansion.

Deborah Poole's (1997) ethnography describes the ways that modern visions of race in the Andes were shaped across colonial history through pictorial images. Poole notes that colonial-era European epistemologies were affected by an increasing interest in non-European peoples. Visual images, she argues, were especially influential in developing European perceptions of race as biological and material

‘fact’. Paul Gilroy (2000) also presents a vivid depiction of the construction of racialized bodies in nineteenth-century “raciology”, but places more emphasis on the modern context, pointing out that “[a]lthough ‘race’-thinking certainly existed in earlier periods, modernity transformed the ways ‘race’ was understood and acted upon” (ibid. 57).

However, “race-thinking” is not something only Europeans might do, whether in history or modernity. People living in places with a colonial past also show forms of race-thinking, but not necessarily in accordance with European explanations of genes and phenotype. While non-European understandings of race may be biological, race can also be explained as mutable, affected by history, labour and food. In his analysis of Andean “indigeneity” in Wila Kjarkeños, Bolivia, Andrew Canessa notes that:

Even as they are essentialized, racial ideologies in the Andes differ from Euro-American ones in that race is clearly mutable; that is, iterative identities are produced through bodies and do not simply belong to the realm of the non-corporal social sphere. ... Wila Kjarkeños hold, as do many other Andean people, that the food they eat and the labor they perform produce brown fat around their organs which white people simply do not possess. (2012: 27)

Mary Weismantel makes a similar observation when describing how Andean people locate race in the body. She emphasizes that race is an organic process, something that is “being made” over time as racial bodily substances accumulate (2001: 266).

Like Canessa, the Mexican anthropologist and archaeologist Manuel Gamio also explains race in relation to people’s capacity for labor and their nutrition:

Mexican workers can be divided into two great racial categories, the first comprising individuals of pure Indian race or individuals of mixed race in whom the indigenous component predominates, and the other formed by individuals of original European blood or those in which this blood dominates. Those of the first group are slow and moderate generators of energy and effort, but they surpass the second group in terms of consistency, duration, and resistance. It appears that their muscular development is inferior to that of the second group, given that their nutrition is frugal and exclusively vegetarian ... [The] muscular development [of the workers of the second group] is apparently better and their nutrition more mixed and abundant ...

[Furthermore], workers [have] certain capacities that are adapted to the physical and anatomical characteristics imposed on them by their respective local environments. (2010: 132)

Gamio here presents a contrast between “Indian” and “European” people along racial terms. Like the Wila Kjarkeños’ described by Canessa, Gamio explains racial difference as a function of people’s diet and (other) environmental factors. Unlike people in the Andes, however, Gamio suggests that race is a function of “blood”, of hereditary, genetic traits – as European eugenic thinkers did.

In her book *Un/Common Cultures* Kamala Visweswaran suggests that “expunging race from social science by assigning it to biology, as Boas and his students – including Gamio – did, helped legitimate the scientific study of race, thereby fuelling the machine of scientific racism” (2010: 53). According to Visweswaran – notwithstanding the powerful arguments of Boas against racism – Boas “adhered to a kind of ‘pure types’ thinking” (ibid. 61). She further noted that the concept-creating actions of Boas’ student Ashley Montagu in replacing “race” with “ethnic group” as a less value-laden term, did not diminish the anthropological adherence to a belief in inherited human population differences, but effectively essentialized “racialism” into “culturalism” (Visweswaran 2010: 61; see also Abu-Lughod 1991).

Despite this critique, an applauded legacy of Franz Boas, his students and contemporaries such as William Du Bois, is that in anthropology, and beyond, the concept of ‘human races’ became contested. Assigning value judgements to “racial differences” and upholding an explicitly racial vocabulary has slowly become politically incorrect and empirically invalid.² As a result, some anthropologists express difficulty in using terms like ‘mixed-race’, ‘hybridity’ and ‘dual heritage’ because they imply the existence of ‘pure races’ (Spencer 2006: 222; see also Khan 2001; Young 1995).

² In other academic circles differentiation of humans on the basis of race remains part of scientific terminology, for instance in certain medical (health) and psychological (intelligence) studies (see Hacking 2005; Herrnstein and Murray 1994).

Other scholars such as Anzaldúa (1987), Howard (2001) and Zack (2001) propose that even if we accept that human races do not exist as scientific taxonomies, we cannot ignore these terms, because in lay society they refer to presumably real or at least meaningful phenomena – particularly in the Americas, including the Caribbean. A complete avoidance of “the ‘race’ concept” has been criticized as a form of “new racism” because it “contribut[es] to a blind universe which overlooks difference in the name of equality or humanism” (Challinor 2012: 1559). As Elizabeth Challinor points out, even if anthropologists seek to “avoid engaging in ping-pong deconstructions of oppositional categories” and research “anything but the four-letter word”, the field may present “race”, if not as a discursive or even institutionalized social reality, at least as a practical category that impacts relations between social actors (ibid. 1558-9).

Colonial racism left a deep footprint on the human world. In the Caribbean, “the [racial] stereotypes formed during the nineteenth century inform contemporary relations” (Yelvington 1993: 7; Brereton 1974). In Suriname, neither the concept of race, nor the practice of thinking in racial categories, was considered ‘invalid’. Somewhat to my discomfort, I was confronted with a field site in which people had not adopted colour-blindness in conformation with colonially apologetic white European anthropologists avoiding the race-concept. Dogla discourse in Nickerie presented an ambiguous but undeniable struggle with race as marker of differentiation between people.

However, race was in dogla discourse not simply “situated in a specifically Western history” (Wade 1993: 32), rooted in European colonialism. Indeed, the term ‘dogla’ itself is not Western but derived from the Hindu word for illegitimate child or bastard (Reddock 1994; Regis 2011). As I will explain in more detail later with regards to ‘doglarization’, the mixed dogla category carries the burden of European racism as well as Hindu ideas of caste purity and impurity. First, however, I will take a moment to look at how racial relations in the New World were shaped during colonialism, and in particular at how anxieties around mixed-race identities and

mixed marriages destabilized these relations while exposing and emphasizing racial inequalities between white colonizers and black labourers.

Race-Mixing in the Colonial Period

In her study of racial attitudes and sexual values in nineteenth century Cuba, Verena Martinez-Alier discusses the colonial regulation of intermarriage between spouses of different social status. With race as the clearest dividing line in colonial Cuba's social hierarchy, legal restrictions particularly concerned interracial marriage. She argues that "racial perception was a direct consequence of the degree to which slavery and its exigencies had affected the total social structure" (1974: 2). However, in comparing racism in colonial Cuba to the Hindu caste system, Martinez-Alier warns against sociological treatments of race as a criterion of stratification in itself, for "race stands often as a symbol for other differences ... strains and tensions in society that may be the result of a variety of factors are often justified and rationalized in terms of racial distinctions" (ibid. 6). In nineteenth-century Cuba, the main base of the society's hierarchical structure was the highly unequal distribution of resources and labour, with which distinctions of colour and class were largely aligned.

As Martinez-Alier points out, Cuba's hierarchical structure was maintained by "an emphasis on heredity, with regard both to property as well as to status, coupled with a class endogamous marriage pattern" (1974: 123). In marriage, family honour was specifically connected to the chastity of women:

As a corollary of the central role played by female honour, man's sexual conduct was of less social consequence. Hence hypergenation, that is procreation between upper-class men and lower-class women, could be tolerated and did not constitute a menace to group integrity. (ibid. 118)

Martinez-Alier shows how dissidents who wanted to marry despite family dissent had two options: through appealing to the authorities to overrule their parental objection, or through elopement. With a discourse of *limpieza de sangre* (cleanliness/purity of blood), "parents preferred to put up with a dishonoured

daughter rather than allow their ‘lineage’ to become impure” (1974: 113). However, “the system contained its own seeds of destruction” (ibid. 81):

Miscegenation was the consequence of a demographic disequilibrium but also one more manifestation of the dominant sector’s exploitative practices coupled with the coloured woman’s pursuit of the white ideal. The product was the mulattos [*pardos*], who ... increasingly posed an administrative and social problem. (ibid. 81)

Thus, Martinez-Alier notes that “the control over the choice of spouse was fundamental for the maintenance of the system” and that “[i]nterracial marriages were to be restricted, if not outright prohibited, because the ‘equilibrium’ of the society demanded it” (1974: 123, 75). With attention to the importance of female chastity in relation to family honour, she suggests that dissidents who intermarried against the law and against family disapproval were a threat to the system of racial and class hierarchy. This is a point which has been extensively elaborated by Ann Stoler in her historical studies on empire, race and sexuality in colonial Southeast Asia.

As Stoler’s work shows, colonial discourse about *métissage* (mixed-race) exposes how race and sexuality determined colonial securities and insecurities around power and empire. In her critical assessment of Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, Stoler explained Foucault’s concept of “biopower” with attention both to the “*disciplining* of individual bodies” and to “the ‘global’ *regulation* of the biological processes of human beings” (1995b: 33, italics in original). According to Stoler such “calculated management of life” was – in the context of nineteenth century colonialism – about an “education of bourgeois desire”, wherein the European bourgeoisie was ‘imperialily educated’ as to whom one was allowed to have sex with and, to paraphrase her sophisticated analysis rather bluntly, whom one should racially stigmatize (ibid. 33, 109).

With reference to colonial Southeast Asia, Stoler shows how colonial power was infused with (if not dependent on) racial essentialism – or a sense of what ‘ought to be kept pure’ – and how racial purity was to be achieved through controlling sexuality, particularly that of women:

The point is that these deployments of alliance and sexuality were both part of the colonial order of things; at one moment competing, at other moments convergent through which distinctly gendered forms of racial and class power were ordered and displayed (Stoler 1995b: 46).

In colonial Suriname, adjacent discourses of empire and sexuality prescribed that “sexual intercourse between negroes and white women was in the eyes of the colonial administrations a mortal sin *because it would totally derange social relations*” (Buddingh’ 2012: 70, emphasis added). The white woman would be whipped, branded and banned from the colony, the black man killed. Sexual intercourse between white planters and *negerinnen* (“negroe” women) or *Indiaandinnen* (indigenous women) was punished with paying a fee of two bags of sugar, or, later, money (ibid.), although by the eighteenth century the prohibition was ignored and *concubinage* (planters taking a black woman as concubine) widespread.

Buddingh’ explains the restrictions on sexuality and on who was allowed to marry whom in relation to “the strongly hierarchical organisation of the plantation company” (ibid. 71), noting that “despite the fact that white men had sexual relations with black and coloured women, the social distance between the racial groups did not diminish” (e.g. concubines could not claim entitlements to the man’s possessions or estate) because such diminishment would “disturb hierarchical colonial relations” (ibid. 72). As Surinamese author Cynthia McLeod beautifully narrates in her novel *Hoe Duur Was de Suiker* (1995, translated into English as *The Cost of Sugar*, 2007), it was particularly through the embodiment of mixed or mulatto women that this system of racial control of empire ‘fell’; mixed-race concubine women attached to planters’ families in colonial Suriname increasingly disturbed the hierarchical distinctions of colour that the colonial administrations had so fervently tried to maintain (see also McLeod 2000).

The power of Stoler’s work on Southeast Asia, and of Martinez-Alier’s work on Cuba, is that both are not only about colonial empire but can be expanded into postcolonial contexts in which sex, class, race, and power are similarly regulated. Indeed, the exertion of “biopower” in educating sexual desire so as to control race

appears to continue unabated in contemporary Suriname's postcolonial process of nation-building and identity-making. With emancipatory ethnic movements seeking recognition to gain rights in the ruling of independent Suriname (see Chapter One), boundary maintenance – whether couched in racial (*ras*) or ethnic (*ethniciteit*) terminology – has been concerned with controlling sexuality across social groups.

As I will show in Chapter Four, dogla discourse in Nickerie differentiated between a perceived Hindustani sexual discipline and an assumed Creole lack thereof. But dogla discourse also questioned this differentiation by stressing irregularities or exceptions to the rule on either side, thereby blurring the boundaries drawn between families on the basis of how both sexual desires and political principles were ethnically determined. Throughout this thesis I will argue that doglas – a postcolonial hybrid category created through mixed Creole-Hindustani relationships – both stressed and dissolved Suriname's ethnic essentialism.

Before discussing hybridity in the Caribbean, however, I will turn first to the onset and popularity of hybrid ideologies in the Americas during the late colonial period, with an emphasis on important nationalist developments in Mexico and Brazil.

Hybrid Ideologies in the Colonial Americas

In discussions of mixed ethnic identifications, terms such as hybridity, syncretism, and, particularly in the literature of the Caribbean and Latin America, *mestizaje* or *métissage*, often surface interchangeably. All these terms imply some form of mixing of two or more cultural, religious, ethnic and/or 'racial' categories. With reference to the term *métissage*, Kevin Yelvington remarks: "Colonial Latin American and Caribbean concepts of 'race' and hence blackness are defined under the rubric of *mestizaje* (*métissage* in French), meaning miscegenation or 'race'-mixing as well as a cultural blending" (2001: 242). Robin Cohen and Paul Kennedy define hybridity as "the creation of dynamic mixed cultures" (2000: 377). Ann Stoler understands *métissage* more specifically as "interracial unions" giving rise to a progeny that is referred to as *métis*, "mixed bloods" (1992: 514). Syncretism, defined by the Oxford

English Dictionary as “attempted union or reconciliation of diverse or opposite tenets or practices” (1961 [1933]: 378), is in the anthropological literature often understood as a mixing of religious traditions (see Stewart 1999; Stewart and Shaw 1994).

According to Shalini Puri (2004: 3), it is important to distinguish among different experiences of hybridity:

For it seems to me we are better served by terms such as *mestizaje*, creolization, douglarization, *jibarismo*, and the like – not because any one of them constitutes a perfected discourse, model or explanation, but because the multiplicity of terms itself helps keep visible the specificities and histories of each term.

Indeed, in the case of Suriname it is crucial to distinguish between the terms of ‘creolization’ and ‘douglarization’ because, as Puri acknowledges, these terms hold different histories and bear reference to people with specific stories and backgrounds that cannot be understood fully through the general term ‘hybridity’. Taking into account specific histories helps us to explain why Creoles and doglas in the Caribbean are understood so differently. This is a crucial point, to which I shall return in the section on doglarization below.

In a discussion of syncretism, Charles Stewart (1999) suggests that scholars can overcome ambivalent attitudes towards using terms of hybridity and take new approaches to “the ethnographic study of cultural mixture”, when recognizing the context-specific meanings of these terms (ibid. 40). Stewart points out that positive or negative connotations with the term ‘hybridity’ depend on the political context in which scholars work. While the belief that ‘racial mixes’ are inferior to ‘pure races’ is often dismissed as the realm of nineteenth century thinkers, anti-miscegenation views remain surprisingly persistent even in contemporary societies – note the legal prohibition of so-called “interracial marriages” in the United States until 1967 (Root 2004: 145).

Whereas in the United States strong anti-miscegenation ideas prevented a “melting pot” from happening (Glazer and Moynihan 1963), New World anthropologists such

as Melville Herskovits and Gilberto Freyre envisioned the potential of such mixtures as nation-building strategies in the colonies (see Freyre 1986 [1933]; Herskovits 1928). According to Stewart, “New World nationalisms did not form their positive views of mixture solely on aesthetic grounds, but in subversive resistance to the colonial metropolitan arrogation of purity” (1999: 54)

In Mexico, where the idea of national *mestizaje* was born, a “revolutionary mythohistory of mestizaje revalued mixture in positive terms and became the cornerstone of ... a state-led ‘cultural revolution’” (Alonso 2004: 462). One of the most active protagonists for a new hybrid Mexican nationhood was the revolutionary intellectual José Vasconcelos. In his essay ‘The Cosmic Race’ – *La raza cósmica*, originally published in 1925 – Vasconcelos envisions an unprecedented development of “the Iberian part of the [American] continent [which] possesses the spiritual factors, the race, and the territory necessary for the great enterprise of initiating the new universal era of Humanity” (1997: 38-9):

Thus we have ... the four racial trunks: the Black, the Indian, the Mongol, and the White. ... The civilization developed and organized in our times by the whites has set the moral and material basis for the union of all men into a fifth universal race, the fruit of all the previous ones and amelioration of everything past. [...] All the tendencies of the future are intertwined in the present: Mendelianism in biology, socialism in government, growing sympathy among the souls, generalized progress, and the emergence of the fifth race that will fill the planet with the triumphs of the first truly universal, truly cosmic culture. (ibid: 9, 39)

Unlike earlier constructions of hybrid unity in Europe³, the hybridity discourse of Vasconcelos and his revolutionary contemporaries was pitted against an exploitative colonial history of racial inequality and, furthermore, against the continuation of Anglo-Saxon North American hegemonic dominance; his language of the creation of “the cosmic race” was, as Alonso, notes, “explicitly anti-imperialist and anticolonial”

³ Compare, for instance, Brackette’s Williams’ description (following Poliakov 1974) of the construction of ‘Englishness’ – and its resistance by early Scottish nationalists – in post-Middle-Age Britain: “They were a new people: out of five races had been produced a new, valiant, divinely chosen people ... Out of impurity had been born an ideologically defined purity of biogenetic type as the embodiment of a new culture” (1991: 24). The historical and political context in which hybrid identifications were ‘purified’ in seventeenth century Europe and in the twentieth century Americas was, of course, entirely different. Yet the language that has been used in these nation-building efforts seems surprisingly similar across different contexts.

(Alonso 2004: 462). Nevertheless, despite his argument for an all-inclusive, all-encompassing future race, Vasconcelos continued to value whiteness as measure for progress: “we accept the superior ideals of the Whites but not their arrogance” (1997: 25). His mestizo nationalism was “Hispanicist” over “Indigenist” (Alonso 2004: 465).

The mestizo nationalism of Manuel Gamio instead centred on the official revaluation of Mexican *indigenismo* (Alonso 2004; Brading 1988). Trained by Franz Boas, Gamio defended the cultural rights and historical heritage of Mexico’s indigenous populations. Through archaeological excavations and restorations of important indigenous sites, he started a revolutionary Mexican nationalism that celebrates and commemorates pre-Columbus Mexican civilization and art (ibid.). Embracing the 1910-1920 Mexican Revolution, Gamio argues for an indigenous revival in Mexican nationalism as a critique of pre-revolutionary European colonial history. His reconstruction of ancient monuments “re-instated Indian civilization as the foundation of Mexican history” (Brading 1988: 78). That Gamio’s official *indigenismo* was actually a hybrid discourse becomes clear already on the first pages of his book *Forjando Patria*. Using the metaphor of an anvil and “the metals that are all of the races of America”, Gamio urges “the revolutionaries of Mexico to take up the hammer ... to make a new *patria* of intermixed iron and bronze surge from the miraculous anvil. There is the iron.... There is the bronze.... Stir, brothers!” (2010: 24)

The *mestizaje* ideology dominated Latin American nationalisms between the 1930s and early 1990s. As Puri puts it: “*Mestizaje* is the earliest fully elaborated discursive complex of hybridity in Latin America and the Caribbean, and remains the reigning official liberal ideology” (2004: 50-1). In contrast to the ambivalence some scholarship shows towards terms of hybridity, then, other theorists have used these terms in an optimistic fashion. Aisha Khan observes how some thinkers treat hybridity as a concept that has agency, or “an internal energy that motivates or drives it”. Such thinkers often express what she calls “teleological optimism” towards this agency (Khan 2007: 653). One such optimistic scholar is Homi Bhabha, who views

hybridity as a self-empowering means to resist colonial domination, by creating what he called “cultures in-between” the dominant and the inferior (Bhabha 1994).

In his understanding of hybridity Bhabha employs Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of the “intentional hybrid” in language, in which – unlike the unintentional or “organic” hybrid of mixing different discourses in single-voiced speech – speakers purposely create their language through “double-voicing available discourses” (Morson and Emerson 1990: 342). In simultaneously stressing multiple discourses, both those of oppressor and oppressed, Bhabha contends that we enter a “third space”: a hybrid cultural identity, in which we escape the political inequality between dominant and subordinate cultural groups (Bhabha 1994).

Optimism about the nationally unifying potential of hybridity as expressed by Bhabha and other hybridity thinkers has been criticized from various angles. As Peter Wade proposes, abstract analytic terms do not provide much insight into how hybridity is experienced in daily life. In his view, rather than focusing on hybridity as an ideology, paying attention to “how people live the process of racial-cultural mixture” could shed light on whether there is room for optimism in a particular context or not (2005: 239).

Ana María Alonso (2004) argues that Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) “mestiza consciousness” and the hybridity conceptualizations of Homi Bhabha (1995 [1985], 1995 [1988]) and Robert Young (1995) have overlooked the complexity of power addressed by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) in his essays on *Dialogic Imagination*. In their interpretation of hybridity as a subversive strategy able to overthrow colonial categories of race, they reduce Bakhtin’s ideas of hybridized discourse as always being “contestatory”. According to Alonso, a hybridized discourse is not necessarily contestatory but can also be authoritative:

If the authoritative can become contested, so too can the contestatory become authoritative, especially when linked to state power. This seems more in keeping with Bakhtin’s nuanced discussion of the interplay among centripetal and centrifugal forces in language, culture and society than with a more dualistic perspective ... Although in some instances, the voices of a

hybridized construction may be relativized vis-à-vis each other, making it impossible for any one to be authoritative; this is not always the case. Authoritative intentional hybridizations are just as possible as relativized ones; much of this depends on features of the context such as the authority of the speaker or of the genres of discourse involved in hybridization. (2004: 481).

Alonso makes an important point here, because it offers the possibility that a hybrid construction can ‘disappear’ back into the authoritative form of power it was trying to overcome (see also Puri 2004). With reference to national *mestizaje*, Alonso argues that hybridization has been “a key strategy for constructing forms of national-popular sovereignty which, as in the Mexican case, are exclusionary in their very pretensions to be inclusionary” (2005: 59).

Indeed, the Latin American ideology of a hybrid nationhood advanced by Vasconcelos and Gamio – amongst others – has perhaps not been able to rid itself of the colonial force on people’s newly fabricated understandings of self-hood. As Judith Friedlander points out:

Many of the [cultural reconstruction] projects have been aimed at preserving what was left or still known of prehispanic Mexico for the edification of the “more complex” modern Mestizo. More often than not, however, the efforts have ended in the reconstruction rather than the preservation of Indian traditions. (1975: xiv)

Furthermore, as Alberto Moreiras notes, scholars of hybridity tend to “[argue] for hybridity against a reification of cultural identities as some kind of recipe for perpetual flexibility” (1999: 377). In his view, hybrid discourse does not account for persisting inequalities between the dominant and the oppressed, or between the hegemonic group(s) and the ‘subaltern’ (see also Spivak 1985). Ideologies of colour-blindness, couching racial inequalities in class inequalities, may ignore discrimination and marginalization occurring precisely on the basis of people’s skin colour and other somatic features. In the case of Brazil, for instance, “racial inequality has persisted precisely because acceptance of hybridity masked the problems of vertical social mobility of black Brazilians” (Tjon Sie Fat 2009: 24).

The case of Brazil is exemplary for the way the *mestizaje* ideology has spread optimism about racial equality and cordial relations while obscuring the stark reality of the nation's bipolar white-versus-black structure. Gilberto Freyre's widely celebrated work *The Masters and the Slaves* (1986, originally published in 1933 as *Casa Grande e Senzala*) has been crucial in promoting the *mestizaje* concept in Brazil as a political tool for creating the imagination of a race-free national identity and what he termed a "racial democracy" (*democracia racial*) (Sheriff 2001). In her ethnographic work concerning racial relations in Brazil, Robin Sheriff found that despite "the conventional notion that Brazilians see race as a fluid continuum", people in the favela in Rio de Janeiro where she conducted fieldwork "insist that 'if you don't pass for white, you are black'" (2001: 10; see also Sheriff 2003). She asserts that in people's "metadiscursive comments ... intermediate terms such as *moreno* [and] *pardo* are not true racial categories [but] describe an individual's appearance – and provisionally, at that. If one is ... of color ... one [is] ... a member of the *raça negra*" (ibid. 45).

Brian Owensby (2005) also picks up on Brazil's "myth of racial democracy", analyzing the ways that *Racismo Cordial* – a large non-governmental scientific survey questioning racial attitudes in Brazil – shows how colour prejudice persists despite the presumed 'cordiality' claimed by official censuses. However, Owensby also notes that "Brazilians of all colors understand quite well that racial democracy *is* a myth – in the sense that the ideal is contradicted by reality – and yet continue to hold it as an ideal to live by, a fact that cries out for understanding" (2005: 324).

Sheriff offers a plausible answer to Owensby's "fact that cries out for understanding", by arguing that racism and its denial in Brazil is related to the way people talk; people "participate in [the] upkeep [of racial democracy] through their everyday talk, even as they sometimes undermine, in quiet and subterranean ways, its foundation" (2001: 58). According to Sheriff it is particularly in "the silence surrounding the subject of racism", that "*democracia racial* also represents – for Brazilians of all colors and social classes – a passionately embraced dream" (ibid. 10, 11).

To conceive of racial democracy as a dream of national glory is telling for the way Brazilians deal with racism. Sheriff's ethnographic details convincingly show that people do not want to talk about experiences and memories of racism because it "protect[s] oneself and one's intimates from the eruption of anger and the festering of emotional pain" (ibid. 74). For the people in the favela Sheriff spoke with, talking about suffering does not relieve it but, on the contrary, emphasizes it. Perhaps nationalist dreams work to 'overcome' people's experiences of inequality by downplaying hardship for want of a plane of shared unity. The Brazilian dream allows people to deny bipolar racism and emphasize everyone's belonging to "the human race" (Sheriff 2001: 224). Sheriff concludes:

This dreaming – its ability, no matter how compromised, to throw moral doubt into the rigid face of essentialism, wherever it is to be found in the contemporary world – may be all that is left of the beacon that Brazil holds out to the rest of us. (ibid.)

According to John Collins (2007:1003-4), Brazil's silencing of racism is:

an argument about the way the world should be, but is not. Hence, celebration of hybridity and silence about polarized racial categories may be more than an absence and a presence. Rather, the two coexist, each very differently, as interpretations of the workings of race in Brazil.

In his work in the Pelourinho neighbourhood in Salvador, Bahia, Collins explores "people as patrimony" in an ideological context of hybridity in which the city and its residents are both "purif[ied]" and objectified (2012: 425). In the process of turning the Pelourinho into a UNESCO World Heritage site, Collins asserts, local residents are commodified into a cultural tourist attraction (ibid. 2011). He shows how the idea of racial democracy envisions the neighbourhood "as a supposed site of interracial national love ... It is a narrative of the regeneration of a neighbourhood in a nation where ostensible degeneracy has been overcome through an account of national hybridity" (2008: 286). And yet, just as in Mexico's national mestizaje ideology, the form this hybrid 'purification' of people and heritage takes in Brazil is not one of racial equality but is, instead, explicitly racist:

It perpetuates one of the dominant tropes of racial democracy, that is, a movement away from blackness through a progressive whitening, or, understood slightly differently, through the definition of the brown and the modern in contradistinction to the African that lies in history but not in the future. (2011: 688).

In other words, despite Freyre's efforts against white domination, the "ideology of 'whitening' [persists]" (Winant 1992: 175). As John Collins argues, Brazil's racial democracy celebrating hybridity, or *mestizaje*, is not necessarily less racist than the "descent-based and legally-sanctioned distinctions" of North-American racial ideology (2007: 997). However, we need to be careful not to conceive of racial classificatory systems as 'typically' North American versus 'typically' Latin American – as Harry Hoetink advanced in his study of *The Two Variants in Caribbean Race Relations* (1967). Hoetink differentiated two variants of relations between colonists and slaves in the Caribbean. He based these variants on differences between "Iberian colonists with their distinct cultural heritage, and North-West European colonists with theirs" (1967: 3):

The everyday contact between members of [Roman Catholic] Iberian society is undoubtedly marked by social suppleness, by an apparently spontaneous ... warmth, which finds its physical expression in the *abrazo* and other physical expressions of social contact. ... [O]n the North-West European's side, the influence of Protestantism is noticeable in the degree of inhibition in social contacts, in the imposed, forced friendliness ... in the coldness and awkwardness which characterize his superficial contacts. (ibid. 22)

According to Hoetink mixed people, or "coloureds", were more acceptable in the former than in the latter variant because the somatic distance – the extent to which people perceive each other as looking different from one another – between colonizers and slaves was smaller for Iberians than for North-West Europeans:

The somatic norm image of the North-West European Americans in the Caribbean in relations with the negroid groups [is] a considerably greater impediment in the process of racial homogenization through mingling than the slightly different Iberian, or Latin American somatic norm image. (ibid. 190)

Racism in the 'North-West European' USA is often classified in bi-racial terms for its association with the infamous 'one drop rule' – a 'rule' by which even the tiniest

tracing of African background classifies white-looking people as black. Hoetink explained a bi-racial system as one in which mixed persons would be formally classified and/or informally 'pass' as member of one (typically 'non-white') of two distinguished races. The other variant, with fuzzier boundaries and of which Brazil has been taken as exemplary (though not uncontested, as the critique on Freyre's "racial democracy" thesis shows), is the idea of a "colour continuum [which assumes] pure racial categories at each end of the continuum [but] also assumes that there are very few people who actually belong to those pure categories" (England 2010: 198; see also Telles and Sue 2009).

In his comparison of race relations in Brazil and the USA, Edward Telles points out that intermarriage and residential proximity are "far higher" in the former state than in the latter (2004: 192). He points out that "miscegenation in Brazil is not mere ideology. Race mixture occurs in the intimate and residential realms of Brazilian life much more than in the United States, where the worlds of whites and blacks are clearly segmented" (ibid. 223). According to Telles, however, a celebration of "miscegenation" is not necessarily desirable because it downplays the need for affirmative action to help people who are discriminated against on the basis of their skin colour:

[In the USA], racial boundaries have become self-reinforcing through high rates of endogamy, extreme spatial segregation, racially coded friendship networks, a sense of groupness by race and, to a larger extent than in Brazil, shared cultural symbols by race. While such forces ... may have created greater racial polarization, they also have facilitated organized resistance to racism by the formation of highly salient identities based on race. In Brazil ... the lack of classificatory rules and the celebration of a mixed-race type ... represent a positive feature of Brazil's human relations, [but] they also weakened the possibility of group solidarity, therefore undermining a potential foundation for mobilizing to combat racism. (ibid. 232)

Peter Wade problematizes explanations which distinguish different racial classification systems as North American versus Latin American variants, arguing that:

In fact, both regions are variants on a theme and have been in a constant process of mutual racial formation. If globalizing US concepts of race and

identity are clarifying racial categories for some Latin Americans, it may be that Latin American concepts of race are blurring the clarity of racial definitions for some North Americans – without this implying that racism is therefore ameliorated. (2008: 189)

In a similar vein, Sarah England argues that:

[R]ather than characterize entire national cultures as having one kind of racial classification system or another, we should instead look at the specific ways that ... racialization may give rise to biracial identities in some instances (thus revealing a binary logic) and mixed identities in others (revealing the logic of a racial continuum). (2010: 197)

England emphasizes the politicization of race and that “the way mixed identities are articulated is ... responding to particular racial projects of the state” (2010: 210). Applying “racial formation theory” to the Brazilian case, Howard Winant stresses “racial projects [developed by] elites, popular movements, state agencies, religions and intellectuals of all types” as crucial agents of the organization and reorganization of the way race is articulated in social structures (1992: 183). In the next section I will look at the role of such racialized state projects and ideologies in Caribbean nationalisms.

Hybridity and Ethnicity in Caribbean Nationalisms

Shalini Puri (1997, 2004) comments that major theorists of hybridity such as Bhabha, Anzaldúa, and Paul Gilroy have tended to treat hybridity as an abstract category rather than as a phenomenon with concrete dimensions in its local contexts. Their approach, according to Puri, risks a “national unconscious” by reducing hybridity to the same homogenous idea of nationalism it was to transcend (see also England 2010). Puri explains this “national unconscious” as a mechanism by which “the nation-state continues to operate as a cultural category and structure of feeling in the work of avowedly post-nationalist theories” (2004: 13). She instead proposes a theorization of hybridity not in a post-national, globalizing discourse, but by localizing hybridity in its own sphere; or, to be more precise, by localizing hybridities in their own spheres – their specific cultural and political contexts.

Puri understands ‘the hybrid’ as a critical discourse, but also, in the Caribbean, as an instrument for nation building. She argues that while the concept of hybridity finds a positive expression in the arts, such as Calypsonian music, it has so far failed in the political domain. Nevertheless, she sees a role for artistic performances to prepare for (and follow from) political action. In her book *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, Puri strives for a combination of “the space of aesthetic representation” with fair political action towards any citizen of society irrespective of their backgrounds (2004: 1). Puri holds particularly high hopes for a cultural form of hybridity she calls “Dougla poetics” to promote political solidarity between Indians and Africans in Trinidad. She does however acknowledge that “the discursive genealogies and implications of discourses of cultural hybridity” are not simply a “refusal of racist purisms” but “[entail] both progressive and conservative filiations and alliances” (Puri 2004: 3-4). Furthermore, Puri observes that:

Cultural hybridity does not only contain internal epistemological contradictions and differences; epistemologically *similar* discourses of hybridity may be harnessed to quite different political projects ... It is therefore important to read particular discourses of hybridity not only in themselves, but also in relation to other available cultural discourses at the time. (ibid. 5)

She notes that “the purist discourse characteristic of so many nationalist and imperialist projects that metropolitan theories of hybridity have been devoted to overturning has simply not been available to Caribbean nationalisms ... Instead, invocations of cultural hybridity have been crucial to Caribbean nationalisms” (ibid. 6). I share Puri’s emphasis on viewing discourses of hybridity in relation to their particular political contexts and nationalist ideologies. What strikes me, however, is that she seems to lump together all countries in the Caribbean when referring indiscriminately to Caribbean nationalisms as if they were all the same.

However, the pluralist discourse in Suriname presents a different case to the hybridity discourse voiced by independent Trinidad and Tobago’s first Prime Minister Eric Williams – whose discourse, according to Puri, “is representative of Caribbean national discourses” (2004: 48). She quotes Williams from one of his

speeches in which he says: “A nation, like an individual, can have only one mother. The only Mother we recognize is Trinidad and Tobago, and Mother cannot discriminate between her children” (ibid.; in Williams 1962: 281). By contrast, as I will show in this thesis, the nationalist ideology of Unity in Diversity has ruled strong in Surinamese understandings of the postcolonial nation (see Chapter 1).

Taken from a Sanskrit text in the religious-literary book the *Rig-Veda*, the idea of Unity in Diversity was first applied to Surinamese society by the Hindustani politician Jñan Hansdew Adhin at the onset of the Surinamese political system of ethnic power-sharing in the 1950s (Tjon Sie Fat 2009: 15). Adhin’s (1998 [1957]) text *Eenheid in Verscheidenheid* (“Unity in Diversity”) is a political plea for maintaining bounded ethnic groups:

The solution to Suriname’s cultural problem is not to be found in uniformity of religion and culture, which will only bring cultural poverty ... Leave every group to keep and develop their language ... Let there be diversity of religions ... Leave all groups in their own traditions and customs ... Let there be no room for groups feeling superior or inferior in relation to other groups, but equal, while different. Let every group in her own character contribute to the cultural and social development of Suriname. Let there be no uniformity and monotony, but unity in diversity! (Adhin 1998 [1957]: 38)

Adhin’s ideology of Surinamese nation-building advocates that national unity should be achieved through the acknowledgement of cultural difference: that Surinameseness hinges on a public celebration of ethnic diversity – or “plurality” as Furnivall (1939, 1948) would have it. Indeed, Adhin suggests that to be Surinamese is to be part of a discrete ethnic group.

Thus, Suriname’s ideologically dominant celebration of national unity in cultural diversity clearly downplays hybridity in favour of cultural plurality – that is if we understand ‘the hybrid’ as melting pot rather than mosaic. However, as Peter Wade argues for the case of hybridity in Latin America, “nationalist ideologies of *mestizaje* contain and encompass dynamics not only of homogenisation but also of differentiation, maintaining permanent spaces, of a particular kind, for blackness and indigenusness, and creating a mosaic image of national identity” (2005: 240). Indeed, the ideological debate between cultural blending towards uniformity on the

one hand, and an emphasis on isolated cultural pillars on the other, has been crucial to nationalist Surinamese state projects and has dominated Suriname's party politics since the mid-twentieth century movements towards (and against) independence began to take shape (see Chapter 2).

I therefore reject Puri's notion that the hybridity discourse voiced by Eric Williams represents national ideologies in the Caribbean as a whole, attitudes towards hybridity depend on whose nationalist discourse is emphasized (whether or not it is legitimized). Williams' hybridity discourse strikes me as a stereotypically Afro-Caribbean understanding of the nation. To say that this discourse is representative of all Caribbean nationalisms is to ignore Asian – most notably East Indian or Hindustani – discourses stressing plurality. This difference is crucial because, at least in the case of Suriname, it is what has caused most friction in people's efforts to define a postcolonial nation. As Rhoda Reddock (2014: 47) observes:

[I]dentities of mixing and hybridity ... have become important tropes of post-independence discourse in the region, an independence led primarily by the Afro- and Euro-creole elites. With the emergence of late-20th-century Indo-Caribbean identity movements in the southern Caribbean countries ... this rhetoric of mixing became challenged by the Indian rhetoric of purity, which deeply challenged the national hybrid identity.

Likewise, Sarah England points out that “alongside the discourse of creolization is that of racial/cultural pluralism ... a bipolar vision of the [Trinidadian] nation [that] has been reinforced by religious groups and political parties” (2010: 207):

In Trinidad this image of national unity through mixture, a nation that is quintessentially creole, must compete with an alternative image – that of the plural society – where Trinidad is neatly divided into different ethnic groups (primarily Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians), living side by side but inhabiting two different cultural, social, and, as the controversy shows, political worlds ... In Trinidad, then, mixing is simultaneously celebrated as bringing the nation together and as threatening to disrupt its ‘separate but equal’ cultural pluralism. (England 2008: 3)

In Suriname, the pluralist discourse has been so strong that it has been able to overshadow class and colour differences within the Creole and Hindustani groups. Indeed, as Harry Hoetink points out:

The urban East Indians were, more than their rural brethren subject to cultural creolization, yet their ethnic allegiance remained strong, and they continued to be largely endogamous. ... No longer is either contending section confined to one main economic activity or to one social class, as was the case in the past when the Afro-Creoles' pejorative stereotypes of the East Indians derogated their humble rural beginnings. Instead of a hierarchical ordering of the "racial" groups such as we find elsewhere in the Caribbean, we find here a vertical line of division, at each side of which people in comparable or equal class positions but of different "race" compete with one another. (1985: 74-5).

I thus oppose Puri's neglect of the strong pluralist ideology that clearly competes with ideologies of creolization in the three Caribbean countries in which East Indians form a dominant part of the population – Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname. However, I do side with her concern for diverging nationalisms in relation to discourses of hybridity and, like Puri, I doubt that the idea of 'post-nationalism' applies to the current Caribbean context. With their relatively recent processes towards independence from European dominance, people in the Caribbean are striving and struggling to define a nation rather than rejecting the idea of nationhood altogether. It puzzles me that despite her clear rejection of a connection between post-nationalism and cultural hybridity in the Caribbean, she risks misleading her readers by conjoining the two terms in her book title.

Puri points out herself that "perhaps one could argue that compulsive declarations of the death of the nation-state might in fact signal its strength and well-being" (ibid. 9). Likewise, I suggest, the naming of a phenomenon – whether this be 'post-nationalism' or something else, such as 'ethnicity' – suggests its existence. Indeed, I contend that arguing against something actually acknowledges this something (otherwise it cannot be argued against). This dilemma lies at the heart of what I have termed Suriname's 'dogla discourse' – a term I will explain later in this theoretical framework. Let me first turn to a discussion of the literature on 'douglarization' in the Caribbean.

Doglarization in the Caribbean

The term ‘doglarization’ was coined in the 1980s by East Indian religious and nationalist groups in Trinidad (Reddock 1999, 2001). According to Rhoda Reddock, Indo-Trinidadian Hindu leaders suspected that Afro-Trinidadian politicians were “encourag[ing] intimate relations between African men and Indian women in order to ‘Africanize/Creolize’ the population ... This, the Hindu leaders argued, was no solution [to the problem of ‘race relations’] and would lead to the obliteration of the ‘Indian’ race” (1999: 573). Patricia Mohammed explains why in pre-independence Trinidad “[d]espite the scarcity of Indian women, sexual relations between Indian men and African women were extremely rare” (2002: 133):

For their part, Blacks, who had internalised the values of Creole society had contempt for this group of immigrants who spoke “barbarous” languages, dressed differently, and worked for cheaper wages than they did. Indians, on the other hand, regarded the blacks as untouchables and polluted as they ate the flesh of pigs and cattle and engaged in occupations which they considered ritually impure. (ibid)

In Suriname’s colonial context both Africans and Asians were subjugated to white European dominance. Unlike the United States, however, Suriname was a plantation colony rather than a settlement. With the collapse of the colony, the already relatively small percentage of white planters also left, leaving postcolonial Suriname with only a small percentage of white and light-skinned people. As we have seen in Figure 2, in the national census of 2004 almost three quarters of the population self-identified as being of Asian or African descent. An additional 12.5 per cent self-identified as ‘mixed’, or ‘dogla’: a category that is in the Surinamese context not equal to ‘Creole’ – which evolved into an ethnic category on its own (see below) – but also includes Asian descent. I will come back to the distinction between creole and dogla mixing in greater detail below.

Since the mid-twentieth century, Africans and Asians – most notably Creoles and Hindustanis – have been competing with each other in their struggles to define a Surinamese nation and their respective cultural and political role therein.

As Sarah England notes for the case of Trinidad, “Indo and Afro are both highly politicized racial identities, presented in many ways as polar opposites” (2010: 210). She suggests that this political polarisation between these groups might be one of the reasons why “the idea [of] mixture between these two groups is especially problematic and even unnatural” (ibid. 209). In her comparison of mixed-race identities in Trinidad and Honduras, England points out that whereas the *mestizaje* category has become normalized as national Honduran identity because “mixing occurred over so many generations” and is “a distant historical memory”, in the case of the dogla category “the mixture is more recent, that is it is first or second generation” (ibid. 199, 210).

In an earlier article England points out that Creole discourse in the Caribbean is similar to *mestizaje* discourse in Latin America, “in which mixture ... comes to be associated with a particular people, culture and history, although without entirely shedding its history of vertical power relations in which evaluations of color and ancestry have been important in determining the class structure” (2008: 6). I suggest that the vertical power relations dividing white oppressors and black oppressed in the colonial Americas present a further and significant difference from the more equal power relations between Creoles and Hindustanis in the postcolonial Caribbean. In contemporary Suriname there is still a racial hierarchy based on colour and social status, in which lighter skin is advantaged over darker skin. However, in this hierarchical structure, Creoles and Hindustanis cannot be distinguished neatly in terms of social status and colour; the one group is not hierarchically higher or more powerful than the other. Therefore “[t]here is no inherent advantage in having African or Indian blood, suggesting that the ‘racial accounting’ of the colonial period might not be relevant in the case of people who are Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian mixed” (England 2008: 7).

‘Racial accounting’ is a term coined by Daniel Segal (1993), referring to the genealogical tracing of fractions of whiteness and blackness in colonial Trinidad. “Permutations in the system” were systematically recorded, classifying mixed people in terms of, for example, $\frac{1}{4}$ white – $\frac{3}{4}$ black (ibid. 85). According to the logic of this

racial system of accounting, the more ‘white’ one had in the colour scale the higher one’s social status.

Daniel Segal notes that unlike the plethora of recorded white-black mixes on the hierarchical colour line of the colonial Caribbean, in the case of doglas “there was some recognition of an intermediate ‘kind’ ... [but] this mixing was ultimately erased rather than recorded” (1993: 97):

[T]hese two cases of ‘mixing’ differed in that the former, unlike the latter, did not involve ... colonisers. The ‘mixing’ of ‘East Indians’ and ‘blacks’ was of little note to the colonial order as hegemonically constituted and perceived, and though it was acknowledged in linguistic convention, it was not elaborately inscribed there ... In the socially constructed absence of local connections ‘East Indians’ never became ‘Creoles’, and had no place on the Creole scale of colour: they were emphatically ‘East’ and not ‘West Indians’. (ibid.)

Perhaps because of the relatively recent mixing between Africans and Asians, but also because of the persistent political and religious conflict between them, the dogla category explicitly spells out an opposition between these groups rather than conflating them into a single peoplehood (England 2008, 2010). They “are considered to be half and half, a transgression of the supposedly natural border between Indo- and Afro-Trinidadian” (England 2010: 208).

Unlike creole or *mestizaje*, ‘dogla’ has not evolved into a hybrid category that is recognized on its own terms. Instead, as one of my dogla friends in Nickerie phrased it, “Some people say that being dogla is like being a mule [*muilezel*]; that a dogla race cannot exist because doglas are too different from each other [*dat er geen dogla ras kan bestaan omdat doglas teveel van elkaar verschillen*].” This interpretation resonates with early colonial racist associations of mulattos as mules (see Young 1995: 7). However, there appears to be a difference between the racist interpretation of mulattos and doglas as mules in that the former was explained in biological, genetic terms, whereas the latter was, in Nickerie at least, particularly explained in terms of phenotype: people were telling me that doglas cannot constitute a racial group because no two doglas look alike (see Chapter 5).

The racialized visibility of dogla-status has been observed elsewhere in the Caribbean. In her study of how the dogla body is perceived in Trinidad, Sarah England notes that unlike the one drop rule in the USA attributing blackness not only to black-looking people but also to white-looking people if black ancestors were traced or claimed genetically, in Trinidad racialized identities were not primarily about genes but about phenotype, or “what one appears to be rather than what one’s parents or even siblings appear to be” (2008: 13).

Either way, however, ‘dogla’ is considered a non-hereditary identification or, as Puri calls it, a “dis-allowed identity” (2004: 191). Doglas (and their children) are not designated as a “third racial category”, but described as either “Indo” with “Afro” features or the other way around (England 2008; Hernandez-Ramdwar 1997; Segal 1993). By contrast, in Suriname the colonial ‘colour scheme’ of hierarchical labels for white-black mixtures discursively evolved into a single ethnic category termed “Creole”. In this regard, whereas the term ‘creolization’ is generally explained as “combinations or ‘mixes’ of cultures, phenotypes (races and colours), religions, or genders” (Khan 2007: 653), in the Surinamese case creolization can further be understood “as a process whereby people of different ethnic backgrounds develop a new collective identity of ethnic reference which gradually substitutes their respective identities of origins” (Knörr 2007: 6).

Like in Trinidad and Guyana, in twenty-first century Suriname the term ‘dogla’ has a critically different meaning from the term ‘creole’ because of its cultural origin. ‘Dogla’ and the idea of doglarization is not derived from the colonial experience of Europeans and Africans in the Americas. Instead, it is problematized in certain religious and political Hindustani circles and, following its linguistic origin, associated with a threat to Hindustani purity. The Hindi term ‘dogla’ originally referred to mixed offspring in the East Indian context of inter-caste mixture (Reddock 2001). In the Caribbean, ‘dogla’ is not meaningful to the same extent with reference to caste or class systems, but refers instead to racialization along ethnic lines. Whereas until the mid-twentieth century the term referred to people with a Hindustani (East Indian) and a non-Hindustani parent, doglas have since been

recognized more specifically as people with an Afro-Caribbean and an Indo-Caribbean (Hindustani) parent (Birth 1997; Hernandez-Ramdwar 1997; Puri 1997; Regis 2011; Tanikella 2003).

When I was in Suriname, some people used the term ‘dogla’ with greater ethnic breadth than in the former British colonies of the Caribbean by also including Javanese and Chinese parentage in the category of dogla. Whereas other terms were occasionally mentioned – such as “basra snesi” for a Creole-Chinese mix – the term dogla circulated much more commonly than any other terms. Most people in Nickerie umbrella-termed all African-Asian ‘ethnic mixes’ as dogla. As I noted above, the term ‘dogla’ was distinguished from the term ‘creole’ because the first includes mixture with Asians whereas the latter does not. In other words, Creoles were contrasted both with doglas and with Asians, and most notably with Hindustanis. Furthermore, it was particularly the Creole-Hindustani interactions that were regarded as problematic, leading to “racial tension” (van Tuyl 2001: 222).

Tension between Africans and East Indians has also been observed in the Anglophone Caribbean. In the Trinidadian case Puri was referring to, “dougla poetics” celebrating the ‘rainbow’ nation of ethnic hybridity – for instance with the nationalist slogan “All o’ we is one” – have not been able to overcome racial tensions. Sarah England notes that Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians live in “a sometimes harmonious, sometimes tense, division” (England 2008: 4; Hernandez-Ramdwar 1997). As Puri observes:

[I]t is one of the great ironies of decolonization in Trinidad that racial tensions have taken the form of lateral hostility between blacks and Indians (the two largest ethnic groups, with their own different but overlapping histories of exploitation), rather than vertical hostility directed by blacks and Indians together against ... the white ex-plantocracy. ... despite the presence of a long oppositional tradition that has attempted to unite Africans and Indians along class lines, most political discourses have consistently posed African and Indian economic advancement in mutually exclusive terms. The logic of this competition has demanded the discursive production of clearly distinguishable races, and with it, a vocabulary of ‘us’ and ‘them’. (2004: 172)

Sarah England notes that in this racialized context “the term ‘creole’ comes to have connotations of peoplehood”, adding that “Trinidad appears to be a bipolar society with two main races, but where one, the Afro, has the connotations of being an already mixed category, and the other, the Indo, has the connotations of racial and cultural purity” (2010: 208). England calls this the “double discourse of the racial composition of the nation” (ibid.). In this thesis I will argue that mixedness and purity are not a “double discourse”, but together constitute the two necessary elements of the same racial discourse of ethnic relations in the Caribbean.

Rather than saying that “*alongside* the discourse of creolization is that of racial/cultural pluralism” (England 2010: 207, italics added), I suggest that hybrid and essentialist ideologies exist *together*; they reinforce each other’s existence, and remain therefore in constant competition in Caribbean understandings of the nation. As Peter Wade has argued, “*mestizaje* actively reconstitutes the racial origins that seem to vanish in its teleological progress. This means that it cannot stand in an inherent relation of opposition to racial essentialism or act as an antidote to it” (2004: 361). In the same logic, I want to add, hybridity is only possible because of the essentialization of racial categories in the Caribbean. As I noted above with reference to Bruno Latour and Mikhail Bakhtin, hybridity and ethnic essentialism form a dialogic relation.

Furthermore, as Puri (2004: 41) reminds us, “it is crucial to remember that, whether posed by hybridists or essentialists, the simplifying alternative ‘hybridity or essentialism?’ misleads. The real question has never been ‘hybridity or not?’ but rather ‘which hybridity?’” With reference to Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s writings on creolization (see Brathwaite 1974), Puri notes: “The term ‘creole,’ even as it is used today in the Anglophone Caribbean, does not include people of East Indian or Chinese descent ... Using creolization as a figure for Caribbean hybridity thus has its own complex legacy of exclusion” (ibid. 65).

In the Caribbean context it is important to distinguish ‘doglarization’ as a different form of hybridity from ‘creolization’ not only because of the potential for

douglarization “to place cultural hybridity in relation to equality, [offering] a vocabulary for a political identity, not a primarily biological one”, as Puri (ibid. 221) argues; but also, I suggest, because of their different linguistic and historical origins and the differing ways that these terms are used and understood in the contemporary Caribbean.

Charles Stewart notes that “‘creole’ and ‘creolization’ have meant lots of different things at different times ... [In] the sixteenth and seventeenth [century,] ... to be creole meant purity of descent [whereas in] the twentieth [century] ... it meant mixture” (2007: 5). According to Stewart, “in the early colonial period ... ‘Creole’ denoted the offspring of Old World progenitors born and raised in the New World” (ibid. 1). Portuguese and Spanish colonists used it with particular reference to African slaves ‘bred’ in their master’s house in the New World, called *crioulo* and *criollo*, respectively (Stewart 1999).

With primary reference to Mauritius, Thomas Hylland Eriksen observes:

[Anthropology] took the term [creolization] from a particular aspect of colonialism, namely the uprooting and displacement of large numbers of people in colonial plantation economies ... Creoles are uprooted, they belong to a New World, and are contrasted with that which is old, deep, and rooted. [...] Although [non-Creole Mauritians], like the Creoles, can be seen as diasporic populations ... their genealogical and cultural links with their ancestral country enable them to construe their past as an unbroken and continuous narrative ... [which] in an age of identity politics [links] their identity ... with a prestigious civilization – Chinese, Indian, Islamic, or European. (2007: 155, 159)

In the current Caribbean context however, creolization is not necessarily associated with displacement and uprooted-ness, but firstly linked to miscegenation and ‘impurity’. As Rhoda Reddock points out:

The terms *creole* and *creolization* have been used to refer to cultures and cultural processes, language and language development, as well as to peoples with origins elsewhere but born in the Caribbean region. More recently however it has come to refer to the “mixedness” that is supposed to characterize the region ... for the people of these countries, creoleness also relate[s] to the mixing of the people. (2014: 45)

Like creolization, doglarization is also associated with a mixing between people, but with a specific mix including East Indians. Indeed, the dogla category categorically unifies Creoles as a (mixed) ethnic group *not* including Asians. As Percy Hintzen notes:

As the products of Afro-Indian unions, “Douglas” have become integral to the construction of Creole identity in Guyana and Trinidad. They have also come to symbolise the threat posed by creolisation to Asian Indian purity. The theme of “Douglarization” ... has become emblematic of the polluting consequences of sexual contact with Africans. (2002: 99)

Dogla discourse thus departs from colonial European black-white models of race relations in the Americas by including Asian constructions of race. In classic anthropological work in Asia, there are also referents to race. Of course, Suriname’s colonial past of race ideas and Hindu ideas of purity in Asia are only similar if approached from certain angles; from other angles they may have nothing in common, and are even incomparable. Louis Dumont (1980) warned against comparisons between North-American understandings of race and Indian understandings of caste, because North American and Indian societies are “so radically different” (Béteille 1990: 500). According to Béteille (1990) however, race in North America and caste in India intersect in their hierarchical treatment of women as subjects of purity in higher ranks and subjects of pollution in lower ranks. He posits that “whiteness” and “upper caste” are linked to restraining women’s sexual activity across ranks, whereas women in lower ranks of “blackness” and “lower caste” are prone to sexual abuse.

However, dogla discourse in Nickerie is not simply about North-American and Indian societies, but situated in a Caribbean context in which, as Rahim noted: “The *twin influences* of colonial race discourses and Indian to African prejudices are enmeshed in the struggle for power and remain sometimes invisible informants of attitude and behaviour on both sides of the divide (2009: 10, *italics added*).” Rahim’s point is crucial to discussions of race because it not only accounts for the problematic European colonial legacy but also includes racial ideas from India. Whilst claims of its scientific factuality have been discarded by contemporary anthropologists, both amongst anthropologists and in lay perceptions race is commonly understood as a

Western concept rooted in social Darwinist and eugenicist thinking aligned with European colonialism. In Suriname – as in Guyana and Trinidad – however, different understandings of race come together in the bodies of doglas. Doglas in the Caribbean bear not only a legacy of Western colonial ideas of white supremacy, but also a legacy of Hindustani ideas of caste purity. As Reddock points out:

[A]lthough many of the structural and occupational aspects of the Hindu caste system no longer exist in Trinidad and Tobago, caste values continue to govern and influence some relationships both among Indians, Hindus in particular, and with various other groupings in the society. Central to this is the notion of hierarchy: this refers to the general acceptance of a preordained hierarchical system ... [in which] some people are high and others are low. ... This notion of caste hierarchy has been further influenced by the creole hierarchical structure based on colour, ethnicity and class that Indians encountered on arrival in the region. This system reinforced traditional notions of hierarchy, in particular the negative associations with Blackness and positive association of light skin-colour, which is characteristic both of the Hindu caste system and the European color/class structure. (2014: 57-8; see also Reddock 2001)

Dogla discourse thus differs markedly from creolization and *mestizaje* discourses because “this doubly hierarchized color/caste system” (ibid. 58) not only refers back to the colonial European racist legacy and its associated power inequalities between white masters and black slaves. As Loraine van Tuyl noted, “we know ... almost nothing on mixtures not involving “Whites” (2001: 217). According to Van Tuyl:

[L]ay people as well as academics have often ironically attributed the problem of racism to Whiteness, which ... makes it difficult to understand racial tension between two groups who seem more similar than different in terms of skin color, such as the Hindustanis and Creoles. (ibid. 223)

Van Tuyl interviewed fifteen “multiracial” people in Paramaribo, the capital of her home country. She reports:

The participants in my research agreed that the Hindustani and Chinese, who are theoretically also the most hierarchically oriented, were the most committed to maintaining ethnic and racial “purity”, and perceived themselves to be superior to other groups. They reported that the Javanese, Amerindians, and Creoles were less dogmatic in preserving their cultural traditions and racial purity, and Whites were completely left out of this discussion. (ibid. 224)

This is not to suggest that problematic inequalities produced on the basis of colour have ceased to exist. In dogla discourse blackness and whiteness are spelled out no less than in other mixed-race discourses. Yet they are spelled out in a different way because there is no clear dichotomy between who is considered white and who is considered black: both the Hindustani and the Creole ‘group’ are internally differentiated in the often interrelated terms of skin colour and socio-economic status in Surinamese society. This is why dogla discourse evokes a very different mixed-race relationship from that between white planters and their subjugated workers. The Hindustani problem with doglarization stems from a form of racism that is historically and culturally – and most notably religiously – different from white European racism in the colonial Americas. As Van Tuyl concludes:

[among] “traditional” Hindustanis and Chinese ... racial mixing and racial ambiguity are viewed as problematic because they automatically translate into cultural impurity and, more importantly, religious impurity. The objective is not so much to guarantee material well-being (although this is used as a means to an end), but to assure spiritual well-being and salvation.

Yet whereas the blame for aversions or hostility towards Afro-Indo miscegenation tends to be placed on Hindu ideas of racial purity (e.g. see Reddock 1985; van Renselaar 1963), in her ethnographic study of the dogla body in Trinidad, England observed that not all Afro-Trinidadian families were tolerant towards dogla relatives either, because they saw them as Indians – their main political opponents in parliament. Trinidadian politics is dominated by one African and one Indian party. England noted that rejection by either side unsettled some dogla people, but that others viewed it as a unique political advantage because they were able to make a claim for national unity between the two groups in Trinidad. They said that it allowed them “to talk from both sides”, without being pinned down as racist – because one does not criticize one’s own group (ibid. 22).

Unlike these optimistic accounts envisioning doglarization as a means of bridging racial categories and generating a unified national ideology, in Suriname doglas seemed especially aware that politics is more complicated than ‘building bridges’. Like Williams said with reference to doglas in Guyana:

Mixed informants ... most often see themselves as waiting on the sidelines until either Africans or East Indians win out, expecting that they will then be able to align themselves with the most powerful group. In the meantime the struggle to rank order ethnic groups and their cultures continues, producing an increasingly complex discourse of competing criteria. (Williams 1991: 192)

The stereotyping of ethnic groups “[was] and remain[s] part of the process of identifying ‘cultures’, their boundaries, and human embodiments” (ibid. 253). This seemingly tense ambiguity around ethnic stereotyping and hybrid ideology in postcolonial identity-making lies at the heart of what I refer to as ‘dogla discourse’ in Nickerie.

My thesis builds on the theoretical and ethnographic insights of scholars who have written most extensively about doglas and doglarization – most notably the work of Sarah England, Shalini Puri and Rhoda Reddock on doglas in Trinidad and Tobago, and Loraine van Tuyl’s account of doglas in Suriname. What it seeks to contribute to the debate around ethnic essentialism and cultural hybridity in the Caribbean is an understanding of ideologies of mixture and purity as part of one and the same discourse. I will argue that ‘dogla discourse’ in Suriname was not only about bringing people together in struggles of identity around postcolonial nation-building, but also explicitly about highlighting people’s differences in that same postcolonial context of ethnic and racial essentialism. Dogla discourse, as I will explain below, stressed this duality, but not as oppositionality. It instead exposed the intrinsic togetherness of seemingly opposing concepts of essentialism and hybridity, of ‘pure’ and ‘impure’.

The fact that there was an ascription and self-description of ‘dogla-ness’ suggests that whereas doglas were not understood to form or be part of any particular ethnic group because they were “not really ethnic”, they did belong to an ethnic classification system in which people called doglas were distinguished from others who were presumably “really ethnic”. *How* they were distinguished, however, was part of a highly complex and ambiguous discourse in Nickerie that both affirmed and denied the relevance of ethnicity in Suriname’s societal structure. I will argue that

despite its ambiguity and its negotiating power in subverting fixed ethnic categories, the category ‘dogla’ itself lies at the heart of Suriname’s ethnic essentialism – because doglas, as “not really ethnic”, can only exist with the recognition that something understood as ‘the ethnic’ *does* exist, and with clearly defined boundaries indeed.

In the final section below I will explain how I frame my argument of Suriname’s dogla discourse in conversation with Gerd Baumann’s notion of “dual discursive competence”.

Questioning “Dual Discursive Competence” through Dogla Discourse

My use of the phrase ‘dogla discourse’ builds on but also nuances Gerd Baumann’s (1996, 1999) idea of “dual discursive competence”. Understanding ‘discourse’ both as “a way of talking in speech” and as “a way of social action” (1999: 93), Baumann argues that people practice a double or “dual discursive competence” allowing them to think in non-changing essentialist categories whereas they behave in a dynamic, processual fashion which constantly challenges the boundaries of these categories.

As a means to overcome treatment of ethnicity in essentialist terms, Baumann’s suggestion of “dual discursive competence” is a valuable idea. As Baumann himself acknowledged, however, we should be careful to avoid an overemphasis on the ‘processual’ or constructiveness of ethnicity, thereby doing away with essentialism altogether. As Stoler put it, “Essentialisms are always at work, but the features singled out as ‘essential’ don’t stay the same” (in Daniel 2012: 492).

The presumed reliability and simultaneous changeability of concepts points at dual discursive competence ‘in theory’ as well. We *construct* categories contextually while we take the *idea* of separate categories, of essential differences, for granted. For instance, my use of the term ‘dogla’ in this thesis reflects a thinking about social categories as being in flux and context-dependent; but I have also risked using the

term as static ‘fact’ for analytic convenience, in trying to make sense of sameness and difference. It may be difficult to avoid reifying if not essentializing what constructivists argue to be non-essentializable in reality.

According to Baumann (1999), there is a dominant discourse of cultural difference which relies on an essentialist understanding of culture, whereas what he called “the demotic discourse” exposes the processuality or constructiveness of culture:

Both discourses have their purposes. [The dominant discourse] serves the [essentialist] reification of culture, which is wanted by majority media, majority politicians, many minority leaders, and, for instance, parents who want to give their children a sense of cultural belonging and identity. The other [demotic] discourse serves the processual remaking of culture, which is wanted by all those who, in one situation or another, want to escape from the stereotyping of the reifying discourse. (ibid. 95)

Baumann here presents the dominant and demotic discourses of culture rather matter-of-factly as a duality, thereby essentializing both discourses as intrinsically different from one another. In his earlier (1996) ethnography on Southall culture in multicultural London, however, Baumann explained his idea of dual discursive competence in a much more intelligible way than in his later (1999) book *The Multicultural Riddle*. In the later book he seemed to revert to a surprisingly oversimplified presentation of multiculturalism in comparison to his earlier ethnography. In both books he explains dual discursive competence, but in different terms. Whereas in his ethnography he distinguishes dominant from demotic discourses of culture that people use in dual competence, in his later book dual discursive competence involves a contrast between essentialist thought and processual behaviour. The further double-ness that emerges in his explanation of dual discursive competence is confusing. In his ethnography, demotic discourse is not about processual behaviour alone, but also about essentialist thinking, depending on the context in which people use it. Thus Baumann’s insistence on a rather stark opposition between essentialism and processualism in his later book diverges from his earlier insight that dual discursive competence is not simply one of fixity *versus* fluidity, but of both.

Overall, Baumann's underlying idea of dual discursive competence presents a valuable explanation of the complexities of ethnicity and multiculturalism, particularly with relevance to Western European nation-states. My close engagement in this thesis with Baumann's premise of dual discursive competence serves to reinforce Baumann's insightful contribution: the observation that people are contradictory in the ways they *live* ethnic or cultural boundaries. As he observed in his ethnography: "Young Southallians seemed at once to reify their *cultures* and *communities*, and to deny their own reifications" (1996: 4, italics in original).⁴

Dogla discourse, as I describe it in this thesis, diverges from Baumann's idea of dual discursive competence primarily in its insistence on duality as something that signals opposing concepts. Dogla discourse did not deny the conceptual difference between dominant and demotic discourses, nor the conceptual difference between essentialist and processual understandings of culture (and ethnicity). However, dogla discourse in Nickerie exposed an empirical boundary at which dominant and demotic, essentialism and processualism were distinguished but also unified; a boundary that showed not only the contrast but the interplay of, or interdependency between, seemingly oppositional concepts. For Baumann it is clear that dominant and demotic discourses are separate, allowing people to switch identifications all the time. But are negotiations of ethnicity, or cultural difference, always dual? Or are they rather multiple, all subjected to 'essentializing processes' and 'changing essences' perhaps, in which a demotic discourse can be dominant?

Unsurprisingly, my fieldwork reworked my prior expectations of what the field would be like. I expected that in contexts where 'dogla' was a stigmatized concept, practical efforts would be made either to avoid doglarization, or to undo or at least diminish its stigmatization. Likewise, I expected that in contexts where dogla (as 'the hybrid') was seen as the ultimate symbol of postcolonial nationhood, starkly essentialized categories of ethnic difference would be overthrown. What I failed to realize until I started writing the thesis, is that I had been thinking about 'dogla' in oppositional terms, in dualisms of either/or. Yet those dualisms were not there, not in

⁴ Baumann italicizes the terms *culture* and *community* where these form part of the Southall vernacular.

the field, not empirically. The way people talked about and experienced ‘dogla’ was not in terms of ‘good’ (as national symbol) *or* ‘bad’ (as stigma). Without changing its conceptual and practical undercurrents, ‘dogla discourse’ prioritized neither ethnic essentialism nor hybridity, yet emphasized both. The intrinsic interdependency of these concepts threw out any logic of duality, any logic of essentialism *versus* hybridity, and any logic of dominant *versus* demotic.

Research Methodology: What I Did in the Field

In the research ‘design’ I drafted before going to the field, I proposed to use a combination of what Kenneth Pike (1954) termed the *emic* and the *etic* approaches to anthropology: the *emic* approach of noting the meanings and understandings of those under study, and the *etic* approach of noting my interpretations (as ‘observer’) of these meanings and understandings. Towards the end of my fieldwork, however, I felt somewhat lost about what delineated the *emic* and the *etic*, or how my own presence in the field affected their overlap. This overlap became particularly apparent when I started teaching English language classes at the Volkshogeschool Nickerie, a newly opened school for adult education primarily concerned with the empowerment of Hindustani women. As I have argued elsewhere on “Anthropology and the Ethics of Education” (Marchand 2012), teaching in the field can be understood as a form of anthropology’s primary method of participant observation if we understand fieldwork to be a dialogical interaction of teaching and learning.

Where, then, did *emic* end and *etic* start – or the other way around for that matter? Pike may not have had teaching in mind as an anthropological fieldwork method when making his *emic-etic* distinction. Or perhaps he would not be convinced that there was a dialogic relation between fieldworker and the field. Of course, such dialogism did not mean that I somehow ‘melted together’ with the people in the language class, or with any person I interacted with in Nickerie. Indeed, being seen as white and Dutch hardly allows one to melt into one of Holland’s post-colonies, struggling to overcome a brutal plantation history of slavery and indentured labour. That I am acutely aware of Suriname’s colonial history and its legacy will be, I hope, demonstrated in the thesis chapters where I engage that colonial legacy in my ethnographic account.

My first field months in Suriname were filled largely with trying to find people to interview about the role of ethnicity in people’s daily life. A research presentation I did for Nickerian teachers of the Paramaribo-based *Instituut voor de Opleiding der Leraren* (IOL; Institute for the Education of Teachers) was one of the first leads to

being introduced to people called “dogla”, with IOL teachers taking me along to friends, relatives and colleagues for interviews. These introductions then allowed me to meet and befriend people more informally.

Interviews seemed an accepted if not preferred ‘method’ in Nickerie for asking questions about a topic like mine. Both in Paramaribo and in Nickerie, people told me that interviews were “how you learn about us”. Despite my reference to the potential value of group discussions in my pre-fieldwork proposal, when in the field I gave up on the idea of conducting focus groups. People in Nickerie often seemed too busy, or were simply uninterested in flocking together for a group talk. Instead, what people did seem to enjoy was informal mapping exercises, in which I asked people to draw me how they saw themselves in relation to people and the wider environment they lived in (see Chapter Three for how that worked out both methodologically and ethnographically).

The dominant language of communication, during the interviews at least, was Dutch. There are many languages in Suriname, but Dutch has so far remained the official language in politics and formal primary and higher education, and it is the ‘mother tongue’ of the middle classes regardless of ethnic background (McLeod 1995). In the 2004 population census, forty-seven per cent of the Surinamese population noted Dutch as the language most spoken at home, compared to only nine per cent who listed Sranantongo – also referred to as *Surinaams* (Surinamese) – the lingua franca (ABS 2005). In Nickerie thirty-one per cent of the respondents noted Dutch as the language most spoken at home, compared to eleven per cent Sranantongo; but forty-three per cent listed Sarnami, the Surinamese version of Hindi (ABS 2006). Even though Sarnami was the mother tongue of most Hindustani people in Nickerie, however, my neighbours and other people I met in the field also spoke and understood Dutch proficiently, and used the language on a daily basis amongst each other. First generation Guyanese residents in Nickerie usually spoke a form of Guyanese English and often opted for inter-ethnic communication in Sranantongo rather than learning Dutch.

I did not use Sranantongo to any substantive extent during the interviews.⁵ Somewhat to my discomfort, my questions were locally seen as “for study” (*voor studie*) rather than “for the street” (*voor op straat*). Indeed, people generally expected the interviews to be held in Dutch because they associated interviews with formality and everything formal in Suriname occurred in Dutch. Occasionally people did throw in Sranantongo expressions during an interview, but not to any substantive extent. Much to my surprise, some people actually told me that they did not *want* to answer me in Sranantongo because they could not find enough words to explain themselves!

I did however try to familiarize myself with Sranantongo when talking to people more informally – indeed, “on the street”, where Sranantongo was more commonly spoken than at home. Informal talking encompassed listening to everyday gossip, jokes, teasing and informal references people made to specific persons, events or television. I found it particularly interesting to hear how people verbally addressed each other, what they gossiped about and with whom, what they laughed or quarrelled over, and how they discussed problems between them.

Given the variety of mother tongues in Nickerie – and my difficulties with learning Sarnami (people always chose to address and answer me in Dutch or Sranantongo) – I observed people’s communications not strictly with attention to verbal language, but to their bodily and emotional language as well. The more familiar people were with me, the more they involved me in their communications. They translated what had been said in Sarnami, or, more often, switched over to Dutch or Sranantongo. Actually, people in Nickerie generally switched between languages with remarkable flexibility, even amongst family members within the context of their home. Despite the multiplicity of language use in Nickerie, people’s verbal interactions coupled

⁵ Sranantongo developed among slaves in the seventeenth century; based on English, it combines speech patterns, words and intonations from several African languages, mixed with Dutch, Portuguese, and more linguistic influences. Other languages include Sarnami, Javanese, six Maroon languages, several Chinese languages, Portuguese, Lebanese, Urdu, Arabic and various indigenous languages among Amerindians. Practically all inter-ethnic communication in Suriname occurs in Dutch and Sranantongo. A discussion of the different languages in Suriname in relation to ethnic boundary making and unmaking could be a thesis in itself and it would be an interesting field of research to explore.

with bodily expressions gave me a window on how people knew, thought, experienced, and acted.

Gradually, I came to appreciate the anthropological value of participant observation. Participant observation is an unstructured research method perhaps in the sense that you just go about and find your 'data' as you go (Emerson et al. 2001). In my experience, it is primarily about common sense and being kind to people. Participant observation became an invaluable method during my fieldwork. Following the birth of our first child Yasmin Rhea, my interviews were less easily organized and, if they occurred, increasingly unstructured. Slowly but steadily I instead started to pile up a huge bunch of more and less relevant fieldnotes summarizing and reflecting on daily interactions I had with neighbours, at the market, at the bus stop, cycling around, meeting friends and families, going to religious celebrations and other festivities, taking up birthday invitations, and otherwise observing while participating in Nickerie's daily life. I realized that an excellent way to learn about life in Nickerie was to not be in 'city-mode rush' when buying from people's fruit stalls – in fact, never to be in a rush. Taking ample time to talk to people on a daily basis got me increasingly involved in people's personal lives, both public and private (although that distinction often seemed blurred in the local gossip).

During the fieldwork period my type of data recording depended on what people were comfortable with. Most (forty-three of sixty-seven) people I interviewed semi-structuredly, approved of tape-recording. Photographing people and their family privately was not always appreciated, particularly where people worried these images could be 'published' as part of my study. The better I got to know people in Nickerie, the more uncomfortable I felt with carrying a camera around with me when visiting them – especially after my Hindustani neighbours warned me that people could see this as an infringe on their privacy. My neighbour Sharda said:

You can take pictures of people, but it depends what you use it for. Like in the interior tourists photograph Amerindians and Maroons as if they are animals in a zoo. I think it's humiliating. I don't mind being photographed, but you need to be careful. I like it better when you're also in the picture, because it is nice for us to share the memory of when you were here. But

don't take pictures of people you write about, because then they might not tell you what they really think. With photos it is easier to find people, so they will be scared to say things that can be, you know, controversial or something... things political or about other people's families.

I increasingly realized that whereas in the private sphere people gossiped frequently about each other's families and about politicians, they were quick to disguise any critique of others when communicating more publicly. Particularly given the politically – hence ethnically – sensitive climate around the national elections, it was one thing to ask people questions, but quite another thing to breach anonymity by attaching a picture of their face to their words. I kept on top of my written fieldnote material instead, but in hindsight I regret not collecting more visual material – where this had been appropriate of course, such as during public festivals and events.

Although people seemed far less concerned with my use of verbally exchanged information than visual material, referring to their verbal information and personalities was of course undertaken with informed consent, and I have paid due attention to anonymity and pseudonyms when requested. At the Volkshogeschool where I engaged in the English language classes I also asked people's permission to use some things from our class discussions, which people granted largely on the condition that their names and backgrounds were anonymized. One of the people in my classes said:

I'm interested in reading some bits of your thesis when you're ready and I do not mind recognizing myself in it if you quote me. We were in the discussions together. Other people in Nickerie may recognize me if they know me. The reason I want you to give me a pseudonym is for people who read what I said without knowing me. People I don't know do not need to know what my name is, where I work, or how many children I have.

I have tried to pay attention to requests for anonymity without losing too much valuable background information. Where I could only refer to people's details hidden amongst those of other people's, in a few instances I have ethnographically combined these as one 'composite character'.

Upon returning from the field I found myself facing an overabundance of more or less interesting fragments of data. Listening back to recorded interviews whilst also trying to decipher my fieldnotes, I thank my supervisors in Edinburgh for making me realize that ‘the field’ contains a lot more information than I could possibly include in my writing. This thesis is the end result of a selective filtering process of picking bits and pieces and discarding others, trying to clarify links between them that also communicated with the broader conceptual themes in which I had embedded my questions.

Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of two Parts, each containing three chapters. Struggling to confine my constantly intermingling subjects into delineated chapters, I decided to draw a line between situations in which dogla discourse was negotiated in public, and where it was articulated more privately. Of course the public and the private overlap in several ways, hence boundaries between them are not altogether clear. My distinction between Parts I and II is perhaps most easily explained by saying that in Part I, ethnic boundaries in Nickerie are laid bare with reference to their ‘birth’, their instrumental force, and their categorical relativity, all in the context of Suriname’s postcolonial nation-building. In Part II these boundaries come ‘alive’ – in that same postcolonial context of course – in a questioning, through dogla discourse, of what it meant to people in Nickerie to “not really” belong to Suriname’s ethnic categories.

PART I

Chapter One lays a historical basis to understand how ethnicity came to matter in Nickerie. I will present the building blocks of Suriname’s ethnic categories, first, with reference to the colonial redrafting of Suriname’s population through the transatlantic slave trade and indentured labour migration; second, with attention to the ethnically selective ‘Dutchification’ policy of the colonial authorities; and third, in considering the onset of an ethnic emancipation of previously marginalized groups seeking to carve out a political and cultural space in the post-plantation reconfiguration of the state. In this process of making ethnicity, people came to refer to each other in ethnic terms – as Creoles, Maroons, Hindustanis, and Javanese – and made these the main social categories in political efforts and cultural expressions of postcolonial nation-building. Whereas this chapter is primarily historical, it engages ethnographically with the ways people in Nickerie celebrated that ‘history of ethnic boundary making’ through annual commemoration days.

Chapter Two follows on from the first chapter with specific attention to the historically created political system of ethnic party politics. In this chapter I begin to

show how doglas in Nickerie confirmed but also destabilized the historically made ethnic categories. I will demonstrate how during the time of the national election in 2010, doglas in Nickerie framed their support for Bouterse's party both in anti-colonial and in anti-ethnic terms. I have chosen to focus the ethnographic material of this chapter on dogla voting in 2010, because these elections explicitly called for a reconsideration of the role of ethnicity in Surinamese nation-building. Furthermore, they revealed disagreements among politicians in Suriname regarding the country's persistent economic dependence on the former Dutch colonizer. I will show how doglas in Nickerie expressed their support for the ethnically neutral party of Suriname's most controversial political figure, Desi Bouterse, with attention to their perceptions of what it means to be Surinamese.

In the third chapter I question the historically shaped national-ethnic categorizations 'defining' Suriname's population through a consideration of people's spatial identifications with Nickerie. Unlike the first two chapters spanning Surinamese developments at state level, Chapter Three is explicitly about Nickerie. The central tenet in this chapter is that discourses of 'the national' and 'the ethnic' become somewhat faded currency when put in the context of people's relationships to communal space, to 'the local' so to speak. Ethnographically illustrated by the ways in which Nickerians 'mapped' their relation to place, Chapter Three will show how notions of communal belonging – expressed as everyday experiences of group identification – redirected national and ethnic categories to a less pronounced plane of relevance.

PART 2

In the three chapters of Part II, dogla discourse finds its most explicit expression. Whereas Part I provides essential background information about ethnicity in Suriname, my main ethnographic contribution – concerning doglas in Nickerie – is concentrated in Part II. Furthermore, Part II will lay out in more detail how the dialogic interaction between ethnic essentialism and hybridity lies at the heart of Nickerie's dogla discourse. In Chapters Four, Five and Six, we will see in what ways

dogla discourse challenges established notions of ‘mixed-race’. Focused on experiences of doglas in Nickerie, I hope to show what it meant to ‘be’ dogla; how ‘being dogla’ was communicated by people referring to themselves as dogla; and how ‘being dogla’ was assigned to doglas through Nickerie’s racialized discourse of ethnic essentialism and hybridity. I do so by shifting the emphasis from historical, political and spatial identifications, to what Canessa termed “the more intimate spaces of people’s lives” (Canessa 2007a: 146; 2012).

Chapter Four engages with family and gender relations in Nickerie and the ways that dogla discourse negotiated these in a context of ethnic stereotyping. With an emphasis on Hindustani and Creole households, I show how people sought to prevent ‘being dogla’ through what Stoler would call a control of sexuality. I will show how it was particularly through the role of mothers that “zones of the intimate” were directed and manipulated, most notably towards women’s sexuality. With attention to the actual sexual conduct of people in Nickerie, dogla discourse highlights how despite the ‘illegitimacy’ of doglas, mixed-race was perhaps feared but made; and, in this ambiguous vein, how being dogla was also something to be proud of in terms of the Surinamese-ness it conveyed.

In Chapter Five I shift my attention from mixed Hindustani and Creole sexual relationships among couples who were ‘breaching’ ethnic stereotypes, to the ways that doglas experienced childhood and, specifically, to the ways that dogla discourse defined their dogla bodies in adolescence. Given an extreme attention to physical appearance, in Nickerie’s dogla discourse doglas could not be “pure race” both because of “mixed genes” and because of the way they looked. Sticking racialized explanations of ‘genotype’ and ‘phenotype’ onto dogla bodies, however, did not result in a singular understanding of ‘the dogla body’. Dogla discourse in Nickerie differentiated “being dogla” in terms of mixed descent, from “real dogla” if someone was seen as *looking* dogla.

Chapter Six deals with spirit possession and death rituals. It shows that doglas could not experience “ethnic spirits” because they had not learned to nourish, or cultivate

them. Doglas did, however, narrate experiences of intra-kin rebirths, which was explained in terms of nourishing or cultivating alternative spiritual embodiments. As we will see in this chapter, doglas – and people in Nickerie more generally – reasoned that doglas could not be possessed by ethnic spirits because they were “not really ethnic”. This exclusionism of doglas points towards an essentialist understanding of spiritual experience that links specific spirits to specific ethnic groups. People in Nickerie stressed ethnic essentialism by excluding doglas from experiences of ‘ethnic’ spirit possession. Dogla exclusionism in spiritual terms was countered too, however, because people were *also* saying that someone’s relation to spirits depended on their cultivation of that relation, suggesting constructivism rather than essentialism.

I conclude the thesis with a reflection on my overall argument in relation to the main conceptual themes in which this argument is embedded. In sum, the main question this thesis is concerned with is: Why were doglas “not really ethnic” in an otherwise ethnically deterministic system of social categorization? My ethnography will show that doglas in Nickerie were seen as not really ethnic because of a historically grounded belief in ethnic essentialism. This belief in ethnicity was, in turn, hard to overcome precisely because the very idea of dogla existence not only questioned but affirmed the certainty of that belief. As I will elaborate throughout this thesis, essentialized differences between people, whether problematic or not, may be overcome, but continue to persist particularly through the idea of hybridity. Dogla discourse in Nickerie thus both stressed and blurred ethnic boundaries. This ambiguity, I argue, reveals the dialogic relation between concepts of essentialism and processualism, between ethnicity and hybridity; these concepts are not oppositional tenets, but permit each other’s formation.

PART I

Making and Un-Making Ethnicity in Suriname

Chapter One

The Colonial Encounter with Ethnicity in Suriname: An Historical Overview

Suppose they pass a law
They don't want people living here anymore
Everybody got to find they country
According to your race originally
What a confusion I would cause in the place
They might have to shoot me in space
Because they sending Indians to India
And the Negroes back to Africa
Can somebody just tell me
Where they sending poor me
I am neither one nor the other
Six of one, half a dozen of the other
If they really serious about sending back people for true
They will have to split me in two.

Mighty Dougla (in Reddock 2001: 320)

In her ethnography on the cultural struggles of nation-building in Guyana, Brackette Williams (1991) said that “dooglas” were interpreted as people of “No Nation”. “No Nation” refers to:

the belief that if for some reason all Guyanese were forced to leave Guyana, persons of mixed ancestry would be unable to make an unambiguous claim to historically derived rights to another nationality, and would thus become people without a nation. (1991: 288)

The song of the Trinidadian calypsonian *Mighty Dougla*, quoted above, resonates with this idea of having “No Nation” in its concern about splitting in two. A similar sentiment was also expressed by people in Nickerie, who often noted that “doglas do not have a flag”.

Doglas acknowledged the Surinamese flag as a symbol they had learned to respect since their school days. Every morning before classes start, pupils greet the flag on

the school courtyard while singing the national anthem. When doglas said “I do not have a flag” (*ik heb geen vlag*; usually phrased in Sranantongo: *mi no habi fraga*), they meant they did not have an *ethnic* flag, and that therefore they could not be fitted into Suriname’s national structure of stark ethnic categories – a structure of groups presented so separate in dogla discourse as if (figuratively) they had their own flags. At the same time, a lack of ethnic flags symbolized nationhood in Suriname. Doglas were portrayed as “true” (*echte*) Surinamese because they were said to “unify all races” (*in dogla’s komen alle rassen samen*). Whereas dogla discourse sustained the political ideology of Unity in Diversity which proclaimed Surinamese-ness to be rooted in cultural diversity and ethnic essentialism (see below), dogla discourse also invoked an understanding of Surinamese-ness that eliminated the emphasis on ethnic difference. It is this discursive contrast and its implications for our notions of hybridity and ethnicity that lies at the heart of this thesis.

As I pointed out in the Introduction, this thesis is about dogla discourse in Nickerie, about how ethnic categorizations were stressed, negotiated and denied by and through doglas in the context of Suriname’s postcolonial process of nation-building. Of course, both folk and academic concepts of ethnicity and the nation are abstract representations of social realities rather than tangible ‘things’. Yet despite the limitations of abstract categorization, processes of reification are rarely without tangible effects. These concepts often grow legs, and acquire a social life of their own outwith the analytical domain, which is what seems to have happened in Suriname. As such, concepts of ethnicity and the nation may become mechanisms by which people explain and understand both their own identities and the identities of others.

In order to get a grip on why ethnic identifications have been so pervasive in Suriname, we need to ask how these ethnic categories came into being in the first place. As Eric Wolf aptly observes in his study of *Europe and the People Without History*:

Concepts like “nation,” “society,” and “culture” name bits and threaten to turn names into things. Only by understanding these names as bundles of

relationships, and by placing them back into the field from which they were abstracted, can we hope to avoid misleading inferences and increase our share of understanding. (1982: 3)

In this chapter, I argue that the historical trajectory of colonial ethnicity-making is imperative in understanding social relations in Suriname today. Furthermore, it marks the origin of Nickerie's dogla discourse. Dogla discourse both exposes, and is a result of, ambiguities between the celebration of exclusionary ethnic belonging and a shared Surinamese heritage of colonialism and nation-building. When doglas talked to me about cultural heritage and national belonging, the colonial encounter was their point of departure. They explained dogla identity in terms of "our Suriname was made by people from the African and Asian continents who were shipped to the Americas by Dutch colonizers". In other words, there was no 'before colonialism' to dogla discourse in Nickerie.

Of course, the concept of Creoles (see below) was literally born during colonialism as well, as was the idea of a Hindustani 'racial purity' – which does not account for the racialized caste differences among Hindustani people in India. I will return to Creoles, Maroons and Hindustanis with further detail below. For now, let me just say that it is precisely the political 'purification' of Creoles and Hindustanis as bounded ethnic groups that lies at the heart of dogla discourse in Suriname.

The interpretation of being dogla as a result of colonialism signals that colonial history is not mere history, but, I suggest, a "critical event". Veena Das has explained "critical events" as events that bring about "new modes of action ... redefin[ing] traditional categories" and "new forms ... acquired by a variety of political actors, such as caste groups, religious communities, women's groups, and the nation as a whole" (Das 1995: 6). A critical event, then, signals a radical change or renegotiation of how people make meaning of configured categories and identities. In Suriname the critical event of colonialism and subsequent developments following this event were marked by the creation of ethnicity; by the creation of a mechanism of group inclusion and exclusion on ethnic terms. The colonial making of ethnicity was a critical event to dogla discourse in particular because it marked its historical birth.

Furthermore, over thirty-five years after the country's official independence in 1975, people in present-day Suriname appear to have maintained colonial categories dividing the population in ethnic terms. In the subsequent chapters of this thesis I expose counter-currents to the European historicity of the Caribbean by emphasizing how colonial ethnic and racial categories were moulded and negotiated in everyday life in Nickerie. In order to understand what was negotiated however, and why it is so hard to detach Surinamese identity from its colonial labels, we need to ask how ethnic divisions became ingrained in Suriname's nation-building process in the first place.

In the paragraphs below I will substantiate my suggestion of colonialism as a critical event for the making of ethnicity in Suriname. First, I make a brief argument for why colonial history matters in an ethnographic account of doglas in Nickerie. I will then describe how the people of Suriname became divided on ethnic terms during colonization. I do so with attention to three specific processes that instigated and sustained ethnic categorization during the colonial period. First, I make a point of the colonial redrafting of the Surinamese population through the transatlantic slave trade and indentured labour immigration, and show how the relative newcomers defined themselves against each other in ethnic terms. Second, I refer to the colonial 'Dutchification' policy which did not create but accentuated Suriname's ethnic divisions further. Third, I show that the emergence of ethnic party politics, facilitated by the Dutch colonial administrations, was fuelled by popular demands for political recognition – demands that were framed along ethnic lines. Next, I will discuss ideologies of the nation in Suriname, with particular attention to the notion of Unity in Diversity that has backed ethnic party politics. I will then show how Unity in Diversity was not only a political idea, but also popularly enacted during the country's widely celebrated 'ethnic' commemoration days.

Colonial Legacies, or Why History Matters in Suriname

The house slave who poisoned her master's family by putting ground glass in the family food had first to become the family cook. (Mintz 1971: 321)

In his 1992 review of the encounter between anthropology and the Caribbean region, Michel-Rolph Trouillot listed “historicity” as an “inescapable” theme of anthropological studies in the Caribbean (1992: 21). In the words of Sidney Mintz quoted above: we need to know that the woman who poisoned a family was enslaved by that family. With reference to Mintz’s extensive work on the Caribbean, Trouillot noted that “history is never just about the past; that is, the historical process never stops. History is, altogether, part of anthropology, part of what anthropology studies, and part of why anthropology matters” (1992: 31-2).

Despite its inherently western bias reflecting persistent power inequalities, I suggest that we should not underestimate the extent to which colonial history has been inscribed in Suriname’s process of identity-making.⁶ An ethnographic account of ethnic identifications and doglas in the Caribbean risks missing epistemological depth when taken out of its historical colonial context because “[the] social and cultural characteristics [of the Caribbean] – and, some would say, individual idiosyncrasies of their inhabitants (Fisher 1985) – cannot be accounted for, or even described, without reference to colonialism” (Trouillot 1992: 22).

As I noted above, in this thesis Suriname’s colonial history matters because it instigated dogla discourse. According to doglas in Nickerie, their history effectively started with the arrival of their ancestors in colonial Suriname. They told me that “the cultures and races” slaves and indentured labourers (see below) had brought to Suriname from across the Atlantic were “memory” rather than “reality”. Some doglas explicitly referred to their physical bodies as markers of “cultural and racial authenticity” (*culturele en ras-echtheid*), such as Stefan, a primary school teacher in Nickerie. Stefan was keen on reminding his pupils of “our identity” by tapping his right hand with his left hand, stressing “skin” and “body” as markers of “Surinamese-ness”:

⁶ Western definitions of “the Caribbean”, of the post-Columbus “New World” in the Americas, and, indeed, “Caribbean anthropology”, are themselves highly contested because of their colonial roots (Magnus Course, personal communication).

We have Surinamese culture and race because here we have a *body*. Memories of the lands across the seas are not tangible like our *skin*, our *body*. Our culture and mixed-race was made here, when our ancestors set foot in Suriname. It is here where our history starts, where we can say who we are, how we know why we live with ethnic differences. Our body is what makes our identity real, what makes that we are Surinamese.

Colonial history also matters because it was not perceived as ‘some time’ buried in an ‘about other people’ past; it was affecting the ‘here, now and us’, particularly in the unabated struggle of Surinamese nation-building (see Chapter Two). As this chapter shows, however, the making of ethnic divisions in Suriname was not only a project of the State “as a mode of grouping and control of people” (Abélès 1996: 527). It was also – if not primarily – a popular conduct in people’s search for belonging and voice in their ‘New World’. Indeed, unlike in other colonial contexts such as (Belgian) Rwanda and (French) Madagascar, Surinamese ethnicity was not invented – and subsequently exacerbated as divide-and-rule mechanism – by the Dutch colonial authorities. In describing colonialism as a critical event, then, I am not equating colonialism with Dutch authorities alone, but with wider processes affecting people’s self and other identifications during the era referred to as ‘colonialism’. Below, I first make a point of how the transatlantic slave trade and the indentured labour immigration instigated the formation of ethnic groups in Suriname.

Making Ethnicity in Suriname

The Caribbean plantation era was marked by the large-scale abduction and exploitation of African slaves and mistreatment of subsequent Asian indentured labourers.⁷ Dutch enslavement of people from Africa began in 1528 as small-scale trade among sailors exchanging slaves for salt, liquor and arms. From 1621 the Dutch slave trade was formalized under the control of the West-Indian Company (*Westindische Compagnie*), and its procedures for buying and selling slaves resembled that of a stock-exchange. With a growing slave- and booming sugar trade, in 1642 the Dutch West-Indian Company reached the height of its territorial power,

⁷ With dogla discourse as the main concern in this thesis, this chapter only focuses on the colonial making of Suriname’s main ethnic groups (most notably Creole and Hindustani).

having made Nieuw Amsterdam (current New York) the most important slave market of North America; and having occupied not only parts of the North American continent but also more than half of Brazil, a large part of Angola, parts of the Gold Coast and some of the West Indies (Budike and Mungra 1986: 19).

There is much debate on the numbers of Africans who were transported to the New World during the colonial slave trade. In his detailed study of colonial slavery and its abolition covering the period between 1770 and 1850, Robin Blackburn notes that “well over five million slaves were taken from Africa for a New World destination” (1988: 547). Philip Curtin presents estimates as calculated by historians ranging from 3.5 million to 25 million (1969: 13). According to Paul Lovejoy, when referring to revisions of estimates based on Curtin’s study, “[t]he known scale of the slave trade was on the order of 11,863,000 slaves shipped across the Atlantic, with a death rate during the Middle Passage reducing this total by 10 – 20 per cent, which means that 9.6 – 10.8 million slaves were imported into the Americas” (1989: 368). Bert Paasman (2002) and Nathan Nunn (2008) similarly present figures of approximately twelve million African slaves shipped to the Americas. Following Curtin’s (1969) work, Silvia de Groot notes that “[b]etween 1655 and 1807 about 350,000 slaves were imported into Surinam” (1985: 174). Based on Johannes Postma’s (1990) study of *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade*, Rosemarijn Hoeffte presents the lower estimate that 220,000 slaves were shipped to Suriname in the period from 1650 to 1830 (2001: 7). Budike and Mungra settle for the wider approximation of 200,000 to 300,000 slaves over that same period (1986: 25).

The terrible conditions in which the slaves were transported from Africa to the Americas caused many of them to die on the ships or in the dungeons where they were imprisoned prior to departure. About a third of the slaves that were transported from Africa to the Americas were Loangas from the Cameroon and Angola areas; another third were Kromanti from Ghana; a quarter were Mendé or Mandingo from present-day Guinée, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast; and most others were Papa slaves from Togo, Benin and western Nigeria (Budike and Mungra 1986; Hoeffte 2001; Oostindie 2000; Postma 1990). Budike and Mungra (1986) noted,

however, that the slaves bought along the coastal area stretching from Senegal to Angola were also captured in other parts of Africa, sometimes thousands of kilometres inland (see also Stedman 1988 [1970]; Teenstra 1842).

I met a few people in Nickerie who were trying to trace the specific route their enslaved ancestors had travelled, to find out which part of Africa they came from. However, most people in Nickerie who claimed African ancestry called themselves “Creole” or “Surinamese”. This self-identification substantiates the argument of Mintz and Price (1992 [1976]) that rather than tracing “routes” and “roots” (see Gilroy 1993), Africans from various cultural backgrounds created a ‘new’ African-American culture in the New World. Their broad use of “African-American culture”, however, does not account for cultural and political differences between Suriname’s Maroons and Creoles.

The term Maroon (locally also called *busi nengre* (Sr) or *bosneger* (NL): “bush negro”) refers to descendants of the runaway slaves settling in the country’s interior, whereas ‘Creole’ (also *foto nengre* (Sr) or *stadscreeool* (NL): “city negro”) refers to descendants of former slaves born in Suriname who stayed with the colonizers and, following the abolition of slavery, mostly settled in the more urban coastal areas (Hoefte 2001; van Stipriaan 1994).⁸

‘Maroon’ however, is a general term and refers to six autonomous societies which, while all descending from the eighteenth century runaway slaves, have evolved in relative isolation from each other. According to Alex van Stipriaan (1994), the current Ndyuka, Saramaka, Matawai, Paramaka, Aluku and Kwinti Maroon groups developed distinct cultures in, for instance, language and dress (see also Hoefte 2001). Maroons living in the interior have often been depicted as more ‘culturally authentic’ than people residing in Suriname’s coastal areas affected by ‘modern European values’. Not unlike Suriname’s ‘other ethnic groups’ however, Maroons recount their group identity as originating in colonialism (e.g. see Hoogbergen 1990; Price 1983, 2011).

⁸ Sr: Sranantongo. NL: Dutch.

A general disinterest of twentieth century anthropologists in the Caribbean has been traced to a presumed lack of ‘pristine’ cultural originality (Mintz 1974; Yelvington 1996). In contrast to the cultural purity that is often assigned to Suriname’s Maroons, Creoles are generally associated with cultural and racial mixture. The term ‘Creole’, however, has lent itself to various interpretations (see Introduction). In the Surinamese context ‘Creole’ – whether ‘mixed’ or not – is often used to address Afro-Surinamese people who are *not Maroon*. In the country’s ethnic essentialist state structure Creoles are identified as a distinct ethnic category alongside the ethnic categories ‘Maroon’, ‘Hindustani’, and ‘Javanese’.

As with Creoles and Maroons, people from Asia also saw previous identifications with their homeland change when the colonizers brought them to Suriname. During the lengthy legal process towards the abolition of slavery – which was declared official on 1 July 1863 – the Dutch had started to replace former slave labourers on the cocoa and sugar plantations with immigrants from China and Madeira. Furthermore, between 1873 and 1917 over 34,000 Hindustani workers arrived in Suriname, overlapping with almost 33,000 Javanese between 1890 and 1939. Initially most of these workers returned home when their contracts were over. An increasing number, however, took advantage of legislation granting them private agricultural land and decided to settle in Suriname (Buddingh’ 2012; Budike and Mungra 1986; Hoefte 2001; Oostindie 2000; van Dijck 2001).

Now commonly referred to as “the Hindustani”, many Indian labourers came from the provinces of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (Bakker 1999; Buddingh’ 2012; Budike and Mungra 1986; Oostindie 2000). India-based recruiters paid by the colony lured people from various backgrounds and ages and language groups to travel to Calcutta from where the ships would depart to ‘paradise’. These recruiters depicted Suriname beautifully and richly as ‘the land of milk and honey’, or even twisting the name Suriname into *Sre Ram* (holy Ram) to make potential immigrants believe they were going to the land of their God Ram (Budike and Mungra 1986; Oostindie 2000). Such alluring stories attracted people in India of a variety of backgrounds, with some

of them secretly leaving their families to look for ‘the good life’ (de Klerk 1998 [1953]).

These Hindustani people came from various castes, professions, religions, language groups and educational backgrounds (de Klerk 1998 [1953]). Harold Jap-A-Joe, Peter Sjak Shie and Joop Vernooij pointed out that “[s]ince all labourers on the plantation enjoyed the same social position ... caste restrictions could not be followed strictly” (Jap-A-Joe et al. 2001: 204; see also Oostindie 2000). Furthermore, my Hindustani neighbours in Nickerie told me that although some Hindustani in Suriname were referred to as “Brahman” and others were not, they could not tell for sure whether the pandits they followed were “actual Brahmins” or descendents of people who had “changed their caste” upon arrival in Suriname. (This insecurity regarding people’s actual caste background, however, did not prevent Hindus in Nickerie from trusting the religious knowledge of their pandits.)

According to Elizabeth den Boer, “[Hindu] ideas of purity and pollution remained in the consciousness of the indentured labourers, [but these ideas] started to play a new role in the ways in which [indentured labourers] associated with the strange society they perceived as ominous” (2009: 48). She noted that Surinamese Hindus “reconstructed caste-thinking ... to allow for a great amount of solidarity among Hindustani, regardless of religion” (ibid. 56). Among the Hindustani people in Suriname roughly eighty per cent was Hindu. Approximately fifteen per cent of them were Muslim and most others adhered to Catholicism (ABS 2005). Although religious mixing was not encouraged, “Hindustani” (*Hindostaans*) was nevertheless seen as a ‘unified’ ethnic category in Suriname’s ethnic essentialist framework; a category including Hindus, Muslims and Catholics who claimed and were entitled ‘pure’ Indian ancestry.

Budike and Mungra (1986) suggest that Hindus in Suriname expressed ideas of purity and pollution in ethnic terms rather than in caste or even religious terms. Pandits warned Hindustani people not to “assimilate” with the “conspicuously emancipated” life style of Creole people (ibid.; see also Jap-A-Joe et al. 2001). As

Brackette Williams (1991:203) observed in the case of neighbouring Guyana, “intragroup controversy was avoided in favour of the creation and maintenance of an Indian identity ... to distinguish themselves from non-Indians, especially from persons of African descent” (see also Jayawardena 1963; Rauf 1974).

The point I want to make is that the peoples on board the shiploads of slaves and indentured labourers had highly diverse origins; they did not arrive as clearly distinguished ethnic groups, were not clustered as such, and did not cluster themselves as such until they began their life in Suriname. In Nickerie the clustering of colonized peoples into differentiated ethnic groups was partly explained with reference to the diverse geographical origins and associated “cultural traditions” of these people. Some doglas, however, also told me that nineteenth and twentieth century policies of Dutch colonial authorities discriminating between Creoles and Asians had made ethnic divisions stronger. Below I will turn to the colonial policies they referred to.

The Colonial Policy of ‘Dutchification’

In the nineteenth century many colonial plantations were abandoned because of an increasing debt crisis which had started already a century earlier with the 1773 stock market crash at the banks in Amsterdam. The Dutch capital – owning two thirds of the colony since 1770 – had been providing too much credit to the planters in Suriname. Due to disappointing profits the value of the plantations decreased alarmingly and many planters could not pay back what they had borrowed (McLeod 1995). This crisis grew larger in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There were close to five-hundred sugar, coffee, cocoa, tobacco and cotton plantations in Suriname during the eighteenth century. This number dropped to one-hundred-and-eighty in 1901 and down to twenty-four by 1950 (Buddingh’ 2012; van Dijck 2001).

Following the abolition of slavery, many Creoles refused to continue labouring on the plantations and moved from the rural districts to the capital of Paramaribo, where the wealthier (“light-skinned”) among them became associated with the public sector

(Hoeft 2001:13).⁹ When the financial crisis in the eighteenth century caused many Dutch planters to leave Suriname, the lighter-skinned Creoles increasingly moved themselves to the forefront of political institutions, narrowing “the ‘racial’ gap” of white people on top and mixed people in between, but leaving dark-skinned Creoles at the hierarchical bottom. Since the twentieth century, Creole elite have dominated governmental decision-making in Suriname (ibid. 13).

Since their arrival as indentured labourers, Hindustani and Javanese workers remained the agricultural force of Suriname in the rural districts. Nickerie in particular developed as an important economic interest to the colony because of its booming rice production – a crop introduced by Asian immigrants. While the plantation economy was dying, Asian farmers were able to provide a much desired boost to the economy by developing their private, and rapidly growing, small-scale rice sector. From 1920 this agricultural practice was stimulated by the colonial government, which started to reclaim fertile land by laying out Dutch-style polders particularly in the district of Nickerie (van Dijck 2001). Hans Buddingh’ provides the following statistics that show the large proportions to which this new economic sector grew: “In 1910, plantations still accounted for 72 per cent of agricultural production, while smallholders produced the remaining 28 per cent. In 1920, this situation had completely reversed with respectively 29 and 71 per cent” (2001: 74).

When I was in Suriname, Hindustani and Javanese people were still strongly represented in agriculture. The textile trade was dominated by the Lebanese, although increasingly influenced by “New Chinese” (Tjon Sie Fat 2009). Most shops and restaurants were owned by Chinese and Hindustani people. Amerindians and Maroons maintained self-sufficient societies in the interior, but increasingly engaged in logging and wage labour in the coastal regions. Creoles retained a strong position in the administration and running of governmental institutions, but Asians – most notably Hindustani – had also acquired significance in major political decision-

⁹ In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was an extensive terminology to denote mixed children of white planters and African slaves in various ‘levels’ of white-and-blackness (Oostindie 2000; Budike and Mungra 1986). I was not aware of colonial terminology still being in use, but people distinguished between “light” (*lichte*) and “dark” (*donkere*) Creoles – and between *lichte/donkere* Hindustani; and anyone for that matter).

making and representation in governmental sectors (Schalkwijk and de Bruijne 1999; van Stipriaan 1994). As I will explain below, the advancement of Asians in governmental decision-making has been both hindered and aided by colonial policies.

In the nineteenth century the colonial administration introduced a ‘Dutchification’ policy.¹⁰ From 1869 bureaucratic principles were modelled on those of the Netherlands, education was made compulsory for children aged between seven and twelve, and in 1876 Dutch became the official language (Hoeft 2001). Unlike in the colonial Dutch East Indies, where local language and *adat* (custom, or cultural tradition) were left largely to their own, Suriname was seen as a *Nederlandse volksplanting* (“a planting/making of Dutch people”) with an assimilation policy in which the entire population was to be ‘Dutchified’: “white, brown, black and yellow, regardless of whether they are Europeans or Americans, Africans or Asians, to melt together into one [Dutch] language and culture community” (*blank, bruin, zwart en geel, onverschillig of het Europeanen of Amerikanen, Afrikanen of Aziaten zijn, op te smelten tot één ongedeelde [Nederlandse] taal- en cultuurgemeenschap*) (Buddingh’ 2012: 236).

This ‘assimilation’ policy of Dutchification, however, was ethnically selective in its actual practice. It was initially only directed at “light-skinned” Creole middle-class in Paramaribo; and when the census-based right to vote was lowered in 1901 from Dutch-elite-only to more public democracy, it was only this middle-class that benefited by being allowed to set up electoral associations (Hoeft 2001; Ramsodh 2001). Hindustani and Javanese people had not been actively involved in the Dutchification process because they were expected to return to Asia once their contracts of indentured labourship were up. This ethnic selectiveness was for instance expressed in language policies, which encouraged Creoles to learn Dutch, whereas, as Eithne Carlin noted:

¹⁰ I also refer to Suriname’s ‘Dutchification’ policy in a paper on Suriname’s 2010 elections (Marchand 2014).

language posed a problem ... between the Asian immigrants and the management, and with the colony's authorities in general. One attempt at counteracting the problem was not to offer the most recent immigrants, who were expected to return to India, the opportunity to learn Dutch, rather, it was to encourage the Dutch civil servants to learn Hindi. (2001: 228)

Furthermore, Dutchification policy also stimulated religious diversification which developed predominantly along ethnic lines. Hindu and Muslim leaders eagerly responded to the Dutch educational policy in Suriname in which:

private schools run by churches or religious organisations [were] legally equal to public schools run by the government and entitled to subsidies, at least for teacher's salaries. The curriculum, determined by the government, [had] to be followed but religious education [was] free. (Jap-A-Joe et al. 2001: 218)

The ethnically selective Dutchification policy widened the cultural gap between 'light-skinned' Creole elite and other population groups. This gap grew larger still with the 'Indification' (*Verindisching*) policies during the colonial administration of Governor Kielstra between 1933 and 1944 (Hoeft 2001; Ramsodh 1990). It was increasingly apparent that many of the Asian contract labourers had chosen to stay in Suriname, fearing a future of insecurity and poverty in the 'homeland' (informed by former contract labourers re-migrating back to Suriname). Instead, they eagerly made use of the gift of free agricultural plots offered by the colonial authorities. Kielstra granted Hindustani and Javanese farmers relative autonomy in running their agricultural villages and rights to marry according to their own cultural principles (ibid.). Kielstra was resented by Creole elite for allowing 'Asian laws' because these affected the political advantage of Creoles over the other ethnic groups, and their credibility as the new representatives of the Surinamese population (Oostindie 2000). When Kielstra involved Hindustani and Javanese people in governmental decisions and allowed them to take up positions in parliament, the resentment of the Creole elite was increasingly directed towards politically ambitious, hierarchically upward moving Hindustanis (Budike and Mungra 1986; Meel 2001).

These ethnically selective colonial policies of Dutchification and Indification may have been partly responsible for the formation of a system of party politics on ethnic

terms (see below). Douglas in Nickerie were keen to tell me that “colonial history has made our political system and the ethnic parties”. However, ethnic politics and clientelism in twentieth century Suriname was also created by ‘ethnic’ politicians themselves. People were not doggedly following ‘Dutch-made’ colonial categories of difference, but also used ethnic divisions instrumentally as tool for political recognition. In a different context Terence Ranger observed:

Colonial administrators and their missionary and antiquarian colleagues classified and invented and imposed ethnicities as a way of defining/confining their subjects; then many of those subjects took up the new identities and imagined them much more deeply and profoundly as a way of making space for themselves. (1996: 3)

Indeed, ethnic divisions were politicized and emphasized by Surinamese citizens themselves (Budike and Mungra 1986; Jap-A-Joe et al. 2001; Speckman 1963), as I will show below.

Ethnic Emancipation and the Emergence of *Apanjaht* Politics

The political form of Suriname’s democracy today has its origin in Dutch colonial policies. The “first comprehensive set of constitutional regulations” was launched with the colonial Octrooi (Charter) of 2 September 1682 (Mendes 2001:112).¹¹ Under this early charter there were no political parties but a form of rule by a colonial council. The lack of public political participation started to change when the Netherlands became a kingdom in 1813, which affected how the colonies were to be governed. Following major revisions of the Dutch constitution, the introduction of the *Regeringsreglement* (Constitution) in 1865 granted the Surinamese colony limited (elite) democracy and partial economic autonomy. The 1865 constitution is generally seen as providing the first steps towards Suriname’s independence in 1975 (Hoefte 2001; Mendes 2001; Ramsoedh 2001; van Lier 1977).

¹¹ Parts of this section also appear – in similar wording – in a paper on Suriname’s 2010 elections (Marchand 2014).

Major changes towards a political system in colonial Suriname involving popular participation occurred in the 1940s and 1950s. Shortly after the Second World War, in 1946, Suriname's first political parties were set up and in 1948 universal suffrage was introduced. With the acceptance of the *Statuut* (Statute) in 1954 the Surinamese authorities started to run their own internal affairs. Although they were still represented by the Dutch crown and the Netherlands remained responsible for international relations and defence (Helman 1995 [1983]; Khemradj 2002; Meel 1998; Oostindie 2000), Suriname was granted an unprecedented level of autonomy (Hoefte 2001).

The two most influential mid-twentieth century political parties in Suriname, and still crucial players in Suriname's political system today, were the Creole *Nationale Partij Suriname* (National Party Suriname, NPS) and the Hindustani *Verenigde Hindostaanse Partij* (United Hindustani Party, VHP) (Premdas 1993; Ramsodh 2001).¹² The creation of 'ethnic' parties signalled an emancipatory drive by people – most notably from rural areas – seeking to gain political rights (Khemradj 2002). In other words, in the case of these first party formations ethnic group-forming was a political move that used ethnicity to access privileges from the state apparatus. In their struggle for political recognition, this move towards ethnic parties also rearranged the previous difference in colonial privileges between 'light-skinned' (elite) and 'dark-skinned' (working-class) Creoles.

The previous domination of 'light-skinned' Creoles most notably started to wane when 'dark-skinned' Creole Johan Adolf Pengel worked himself up into the government as member of the NPS, demanding more rights for the Creole working class. Pengel found an ally in the Hindustani lawyer Jagernath Lachmon of the VHP, demanding more political rights and emancipation for Hindustani people. In 1958 a Creole-Hindustani multi-party alliance led by Pengel and Lachmon was formed, and five years later joined by a Javanese peasants party (Ramsodh 2001). This multi-ethnic alliance is nowadays referred to as the Surinamese period of fraternization politics. Fraternization was more than a Marxist agreement of economic cooperation

¹² In 1973 renamed *Vooruitstrevende Hervormingspartij* (Progressive Reform Party), VHP.

to politically pull up poorer groups – it was explicitly ethnic. Lachmon himself explained in an interview: “In Suriname one ethnic group cannot rule the country alone. This is why the idea of fraternization politics emerged” (Khemradj 2002: 33).

As ‘brotherly’ as this multiparty alliance may sound, since their inception in the mid-twentieth century the political parties in Suriname were “based on ethnic and religious affiliation, [which] led to a mass politicisation and an intensification of the segmentation of Surinamese society. Segmentation proved stronger than the programmes and objectives of the political parties” (Ramsoedh 2001: 95). Observers of Suriname’s political developments, such as Edward Dew (1978, 1994) have referred to Suriname’s political system of ethnic powersharing as *apanjaht*, a ‘consociational’ democracy based on a historically shaped meta-ideology of ethnic essentialism.

Consociationalism has been the guiding political theory to understand coalition making in Suriname since the 1960s. In the Netherlands, the term ‘consociationalism’ – *verzuiling* in Dutch – referred to the post-war religious divisions between Protestant and Roman Catholic citizens and to the twentieth century political block-forming combining a protestant ‘pillar’ (*zuil*), a roman catholic ‘pillar’, a liberal ‘pillar’ and a social democrat ‘pillar’ in the government (Lijphart 1968; Stuurman 1983). Suriname’s consociationalism was an ethnic ‘pillarization’ portraying people as followers of distinctive cultural paths rather than forming a union (Baud et al. 1994; Snijders 2000).

Edward Dew has explained Suriname’s *apanjaht* as “the practice of ethnically based political parties playing upon prejudice, fear, and/or communal interests to gain support”, and involved “voting for your own race, your own kind” (Dew quoted in MacDonald 1988:107; see also Dew 1978, 1994; Sedney 1997; St-Hilaire 2001; Tjon Sie Fat 2009).

Although the Surinamese State never formally declared *apanjaht* to be a legitimate mechanism of party politics (Tjon Sie Fat 2009: 17), mobilization and voting on

ethnic terms seemed to have acquired perceived legitimacy through its common practice (but see Chapter Two and Marchand (2014) for a questioning of Suriname's ethnic consociationalism during the country's latest democratic elections in 2010). Furthermore, *apanjaht* relied extensively on ethnic clientelism, a "vertical interaction" which Julian Pitt-Rivers has called a "lopsided friendship" denoting the interdependent and reciprocal but unequal power relation between a dominating "patron" and subordinate "client" (Pitt-Rivers 1954: 40; Putnam 1993:174). James Scott, relying on an extensive anthropological literature dealing with patron-client bonds, defined this relationship as follows:

The patron-client relationship – an ex-change relationship between roles – may be defined as a special case of dyadic (two-person) ties involving a largely instrumental friendship in which an individual of higher socioeconomic status (patron) uses his own influence and resources to provide protection or benefits, or both, for a person of lower status (client) who, for his part, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services, to the patron. (1972: 92)

Hans Buddingh' observed that in small-scale countries such as Suriname "ethnic divisions make governments more willing to practice clientelism. Economic policy thus quickly proves to be ethnic policy, simply because the ethnic and economic lines of division run parallel" (2001: 84). The patron-client behaviour of ethnic elites in the government providing income securities for working class 'kinsmen' in the public sector in return for political support is, according to Paul Tjon Sie Fat, "the link between ethnicity and politics in Suriname, as it transforms ethnic identity into a resource" (2009:16). In his ethnography on *Chinese New Migrants in Suriname: The Inevitability of Ethnic Performing*, Tjon Sie Fat commented on: "the strongly informal nature of socio-economic life and the lack of strong institutions, which means building extensive personal networks" (2009:8). Loyalty towards the ethnic group was more important than towards the overall Surinamese population.

Disagreements between party members based on ethnic favouritism rather than national ideology, particularly between the NPS and the VHP, have dominated Suriname's consociationalist *apanjaht* politics (Budike and Mungra 1986; Choenni 1982; Premdas 1993; Ramsodh 2001). As I will show below however, ethnic

favouritism and national ideology were not necessarily incongruent in Suriname. They rather seemed two sides of the same coin. Indeed, the political configurations of ethnicity and ethnic boundary-making in Suriname are particularly visible when considering the ideological and cultural expressions of Unity in Diversity, and its contestations.

National Unity in Ethnic Diversity

When Suriname's governmental composition changed from Creole-elite-only to a system of ethnic power-sharing also involving Hindustani and Javanese people, "holidays important to black Creoles, Hindustani and Javanese obtained an official status" (Jap-A-Joe et al. 2001: 208). Most of these holidays were in the religious sphere, such as the Hindu *Holi Phagwa* festival and the Muslim *Id ul Fitre*. The institutionalizations of these non-Christian holidays acquiring equal national status to Christian holidays at Christmas and Easter were expressions of emancipation for Hindustani and Javanese Hindus and Muslims, as was the revoking in 1971 of the colonial (Christian) law which had banned Afro-Surinamese *Winti* rituals (ibid.).¹³

These celebrations marking the public recognition of Suriname's religious diversity were explicitly intended to stimulate inter-ethnic tolerance. Such tolerance was expected to be achieved by explicitly highlighting and respecting cultural difference. For instance, conforming to the country's popular nationalist ideology of Unity in Diversity (see Theoretical Framework), a much photographed and cited feature in Paramaribo has been the peaceful coexistence of the capital's main mosque and synagogue, located in close proximity to each other (see Figure 3).

The explicit recognition of ethnic categories in the Unity in Diversity definition of Surinamese identity appears as an exception amongst the popular hybridity ideologies of many of its Caribbean and Latin American neighbours. Even Guyana, with which Suriname shares more demographic and historical contingencies than any other state, seems to express its political idea of nationhood in a notion of cultural

¹³ For an explanation of *Winti* see Chapter Six.

unity rather than cultural difference. Its dominant political slogan is “One People, One Nation, One Destiny”, and is enshrined on the ribbon of its coat of arms.

Figure 3: Mosque and Synagogue in Paramaribo



Photo by the author

According to Brackette Williams (1991) the process of producing a cultural nationalism in Guyana was set in motion by the end of territorial colonialism. She argued that the postcolonial struggles of the Guyanese to form a nation should be seen in light of the Anglo-European hegemonic dominance which was a “culture of domination” that sought to conflate ethnic diversity into an Anglo-European inspired cultural unity. “Without a radical transformation”, Williams contends, “the Anglo-European features remain, ideologically, the superior aspects of national civil conduct and of status criteria, especially where the concern is to place the Guyanese state in the international order of nation-states” (1991: 254). She likens Anglo-European hegemony in Guyana to a ghost because its representatives are no longer

physically present yet their legacy continues to influence the lives of contemporary Guyanese.

As in Guyana, Surinamese people share colonial legacies and the influence of an imperial “ghost of hegemony”. Dutch colonial authorities influenced ethnic divisions through ethnic favouritism in politics and a selective ‘Dutchification’ in educational, language and religious policies discriminating between ethnic groups. Gert Oostindie (2000), however, argues against overemphasizing the effect of colonial politics on Suriname’s ethnic configurations. He asserted that although it helped to further the divisions between the largest ethnic groups, “it is a misapprehension to think that the colonial administration could manipulate these ethnic relations to their liking” (ibid. 132). According to Oostindie, and demonstrated by the process of ethnic emancipation in the development of *apanjaht* party politics, the making of ethnicity in Suriname was more than a result of colonial policy alone. As I stress in this chapter, it was also a process among the Surinamese themselves.

Adhin has not, of course, been the sole actor dictating Suriname’s postcolonial ideologies. As in Guyana, Suriname also had a movement toward cultural homogenization. This movement was advocated by elite Creoles educated in the Netherlands, and their nationalism was primarily couched in African symbols syncretized with Western values. It was critical in the drive towards the country’s official independence in 1975, but it was not nationally shared. Not only among Hindustani politicians but also among the Asian working classes, the independence movement was seen as “that Creole thing”, which fuelled ethnic antagonism rather than national unity (Oostindie 2000: 167). Hence in practice, cultural homogenization – as ‘Creolization’ – did not take off in Suriname, presumably because the contrasts between African and Asian groups were considered too stark, leaving Unity in Diversity as the decisive political idea of Surinamese nationhood.

Why the Unity in Diversity idea has been more powerful in Suriname’s postcolonial politics than an ideology of cultural homogenization is not an easy question to answer. It is an ideology infused with complex beliefs, and with power and

opportunities, both at state level and beyond. And of course, as an inevitable premise of politics, there are actors for and against certain structures and beliefs. Clear evidence of diverging nationalist ideologies within postcolonial states is presented by Suriname's most recent national elections in 2010, following which Desi Bouterse was elected President (see Chapter Two).

Whereas Bouterse did not explicitly oppose an ideology of Unity in Diversity, he reminded the Surinamese of the backlashes of ethnic politics and group favouritism rooted, in his view, in colonial strategies to hamper Suriname's progress. Bouterse's military dictatorship in the 1980s was his first attempt to convince the Surinamese people of the unwanted legacy and continuing influence of the Dutch state. Not quite succeeding militarily (to put it mildly), he eventually made a victorious democratic comeback which, perhaps unsurprisingly, was least welcomed by the Netherlands. Unlike that of the earlier ethnic party-politicians, Bouterse's nationalism has been explicitly anti-Dutch (see Chapter Two). In this regard Bouterse is perhaps Suriname's "radical transformation" seeking to overcome the Dutch "ghost of hegemony" (Williams 1991).

It is not clear whether Bouterse's anti-colonial nationalism will also overcome the colonially constructed categories of ethnic difference. Attempting to do so might not be his priority, although one of his changes to Suriname's ethnic structure is that he did not allow ethnicity to appear as statistical category in the latest population census of 2012.

But of course ethnicity and ideas of unity and difference are not simply ideologies or issues negotiated by politicians. As Rogers Brubaker said:

Ethnicity "happens" in a variety of everyday settings. Ethnicity is embodied and expressed not only in political projects and nationalist rhetoric but in everyday encounters, practical categories, commonsense knowledge, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, interactional cues, discursive frames, organizational routines, social networks, and institutional form. (2004: 2)

Brubaker's explanation of everyday ethnicity sounds like a rather exhaustive list perhaps. But it does direct our attention to wider encounters than those at state levels. A particular discursive frame in the context of Suriname is what I have termed 'dogla discourse'; a complex interplay of negating and emphasizing Asian and African identifications in categorizations of 'dogla' as being both, mixed or neither. Dogla discourse involved a questioning by people in Nickerie of what constitutes the ethnic and what constitutes the national in Suriname. It effectively presented an antithesis both to ideologies of ethnic difference and to ideas of cultural homogenization. In this sense, dogla discourse is the antithesis of Suriname's political idea of Unity in Diversity because it unsettles the differentiation of people in clear ethnic categories. It is also the antithesis of Guyana's political slogan "One People, One Nation, One Destiny" and Trinidad's "All o' we is one", because dogla discourse assumes the existence of clear ethnic categories in the first place.¹⁴

Doglas in Nickerie spoke about ethnic categories in terms of 'the' groups – by talking about people as "the Hindustani" (for example) – but were unclear what a definition of "the Hindustani" would have to include and exclude. In terms of their behaviour, people in Nickerie were mobilized to vote ethnically but questioned the colonial construction of ethnicity (see Chapter Two). They named and talked about place rather than ethnicity as markers of communal belonging (see Chapter Three). They frowned upon 'wrong' (mixed) relationships, yet these mixed relationships did occur (see Chapter Four). Doglas were characterized as "impure bodies" and a sign of "racial pollution", but were simultaneously endowed with beauty in specific, recognizable traits (see Chapter Five). And at the same time, people in Nickerie shared spiritual experiences despite ethnically specific spirits (see Chapter Six).

¹⁴ Of course, there is something blatant about political slogans, telling people what to believe or to act accordingly. Regardless of actual realities on the ground, these political ideologies in the Caribbean reify citizens into national objects of either ethnic difference or sameness. Nevertheless, slogans can be powerful mechanisms affecting people's beliefs about their identities. Furthermore, certain ideologies do translate into public policy measures. In the USA, for instance, class- and gender arguments advising colour-blindness, have been competing with social policies of affirmative action explicitly targeting groups discriminated against on the basis of colour (King and Smith 2005).

In this chapter, I have argued that ethnic categories were both constructed and essentialized by the “critical event” of colonialism. I described colonial processes and an ideology that have allowed ethnic essentialism to become a major organizing principle in Surinamese social relations. Below, I will show that this historical creation of ethnic categories continues to be acknowledged – indeed commemorated – by people in postcolonial Suriname. Unity in Diversity was celebrated with public cultural display and pride, most notably to the occasion of the country’s many annual commemorations of ‘sub-national group identity’. These commemorations affirmed ethnic group boundaries according to people’s distinct experiences of becoming Surinamese.

The Celebration of Ethnicity in Suriname

The first week of August 2009 was a festive week in the centre of Nieuw Nickerie, celebrating 130 years of the town’s existence. The week had been opened on Friday 31 July with the national anthem and the lighting of a big flaming torch. On the *Brasaplein* (the town’s main square) there were speeches by people locally referred to as *hoogwaardigheidsbekleders* (“dignitaries”), a fun fair and a mini-market with several gadget- and food stands. Every night DJs took care of the music, with the popular music formation Final Step from Paramaribo performing on Friday 7 August, accompanied by fireworks. On the Sunday morning a “Man Cookout” was organized on the market square, during which men competed with their cookery skills for an always hungry yet critical audience.¹⁵ Other activities were sports events such as cricket, handball, football, a cycling race and a tennis competition, and many games of draughts.

Every afternoon a group in traditional dress staged a cultural show. On Monday there were Amerindian dancers and on Tuesday Javanese dancers. The Wednesday was packed with Creole Kawina music and the Maroon cultural organization Tangiba, the winning girls of the Miss Afiba elections and a Koto-show by Creole women. On

¹⁵ “Man Cookout” is not my translation; it was a local term (in English) referring to cooking competitions between men.

Thursday Hindustani poems and prose were presented and on the Saturday Chinese men performed a dragon dance. On the final day of the celebration, Saturday 8 August – the actual commemoration and most ceremonial day – 130 balloons were released into the air, a speech was made by the country's President Venetiaan, the national flag was hoisted, and there was a parade through the town, a military drill by the National Army, and the presentation of the book *130 years Nieuw Nickerie*.

The capital of the Nickerie district, called Nieuw Nickerie, acquired its name in 1879. Around 1820 a town called *Nickerie-punt* (Nickerie-point) or simply *De Punt* (The Point) was built at a point at the mouth of the Nickerie river from which trade was established with the neighbouring district of Berbice (in Guyana) across the Corantijn River. Around 1850 when The Point started to become a place of economic interest to the colony it was renamed Nieuw (New) Rotterdam. From 1859 onwards however, it became clear that the sandy Nickerie coast was being taken by the sea. When the flooding of the land became a real threat to Nieuw Rotterdam, in 1870 the colonial administration decided to move the town centre southerly to a newly impoldered area. The fear of flooding by the sea remained, however, and it was estimated that the sea would destroy the dykes and flood the town within one or two years. Eventually it was decided to relocate the town away from the coast in between the plantations of Margarethenburg and Waterloo. In its new location the town has been known as Nieuw Nickerie since 1879 (van Heckers 1923: 120-135).

Stuart and I took to the town to have a look at the festivities. Normally the clothes we wore were not remarkably out of tune with the general Nickerian (Western) 'dress code'. The celebration week of 130 years Nieuw Nickerie, however, was a colourful gathering of people dressing 'traditionally'. It looked as if the Nickerians habitually wore the main ethnic dresses worn by women in twentieth-century Suriname as shown on the postcard I had seen in tourist shops in Paramaribo (apart from the Buru dress, see Figure 4).¹⁶

¹⁶ *Buru* is the Sranantongo translation of the Dutch *boer* (farmer): *Burus* were Dutch farmers who supplied the markets of Paramaribo with dairy products and vegetables until Hindustani immigrants started to take over most of the country's food market from the end of the nineteenth century onwards (Hoeft 2001). I have not met anyone who self-identified (nor was identified by others) as "Buru" in Nickerie.

The Nieuw Nickerie 130th anniversary celebration was only one among Suriname's many annual commemorations showing the colonial heritage of making ethnicity in Suriname. These commemorations were events where people literally dressed as 'cultures'. Similar to the Nieuw Nickerie 130th anniversary celebrations, these commemorations were usually marked by ethnic expressions of speeches and poetry in 'ethnic languages' and often musical or theatrical performances, and communal walks in 'traditional dress' to the town's ethnic commemoration monuments. The type of memorial celebrations referred to here are those marking significant historical events such as *Keti Koti* ("the chains have been broken") recalling the abolition of slavery in Suriname (Van Stipriaan 2004), and the Hindustani and Javanese remembrance of the first arrival of people from India and Indonesia in Suriname for indentured labourship.

Figure 4: Tourist Postcard with Ethnic Dresses in Twentieth Century Suriname
(from left to right: Amerindian, Maroon, Chinese, Creole, Buru, Hindustani, Javanese)



Source: Suriname.Nu¹⁷

My impression of these memorial days in Nickerie was that they were not simply about expressing cultural distinctiveness with references to homelands in Africa,

¹⁷ Image of postcard retrieved from <http://www.suriname.nu/201cult/klederdracht01.html> [accessed 28 July 2013]

India or Java, but also – if not primarily – about marking the beginnings of Surinamese citizenship. Although differently memorized and celebrated, and in their unique historical and cultural contexts of course, these ethnic celebrations did not seem to have the effect of positioning Creoles, Maroons, Hindustani and Javanese on opposing directions of a compass, but rather to acknowledge the centre of that compass as being Suriname.

The annual Hindustani celebration in the week of 5 June, for instance, was to commemorate the first people from India setting foot on Surinamese soils under a colonial contract of indentured labour, on 5 June 1873. See below a photo of the monument in Paramaribo which had been erected by the government to commemorate this historical event (see Figure 5). In the week of 5 June, Hindustanis, dressed in saris and dhotis, drape flowers over “Baba and Mai” (their ‘parents’) and organize various culturally inspired meetings.

Figure 5: Baba and Mai Monument in Paramaribo



Photo taken by Stuart

Rather than narrating where Baba and Mai actually came from in terms of their ‘homeland’, the main focus of the celebration is on how the Hindustani have since

developed themselves culturally, economically, and politically in the New World. In other words, the emphasis is on the present rather than on the past, on the descendants rather than on the ancestors. Of course, the experience of indentured labour was not the same as that of slavery, and neither of these celebrations should be romanticized or portrayed as mere cultural events.

Figure 6: Kwakoe Statue in Paramaribo



Source: Moomou (2011)

Keti Koti or Emancipation Day is an extremely important day for Creole and Maroon people as a tribute to ancestors who were subjected to the physical and emotional torture and hardship of plantation slavery, and the traumas of inferior treatment these memories have brought some descendants. The monuments of Kwakoe in Paramaribo and Alida in Nickerie have both been erected to commemorate the atrocities of slavery and the colonial slave revolts against the European “plantocracy”. Kwakoe was one of the names given to former slaves born on Wednesdays. According to people I spoke to in Paramaribo, Kwakoe was also the name of one of the heroic slaves who escaped the colonial plantations. In Suriname slavery was officially abolished on Wednesday 1 July 1863. The Kwakoe monument

was erected 100 years later to mark the commemoration of *Keti Koti*. On 1 July the statue is dressed with a Maroon *pangi* (loincloth) and head scarf; see Figure 6.

We are dealing with different commemoration days concerning different memories and people. Nevertheless, the point I want to make is that none of these commemorations carry much meaning beyond the Surinamese context of its colonial history and post-independence developments. Of course, given that an estimated 275,000 Surinamese reside in the Netherlands (Oostindie 2000) and because of the grim reminder and dark shadow these commemorations cast on Dutch colonial history, these particular days are relevant to people in the Netherlands and are indeed commemorated there as well with no less cultural entourage than in Suriname.

The effects of the eras of colonialism, of slavery and of indentured labour, are not confined to Suriname, or even to the Caribbean. However, as Paul Gilroy (1993, 2000) pointed out in his arguments about “raciology” or “race-thinking”, the Diaspora groups he called “the Black Atlantic” are only unified as a group by that name. Stretching from West Africa to the Caribbean and the Southern United States of America to parts of Europe, Gilroy contends that the spaces occupied by the Black Atlantic allows this loosely defined Diaspora group to transcend essentialized understandings of culture and race because – although they form a social togetherness only in parts of their historical experiences (in “routes”) – they cannot be described as having a common culture (or “roots”).

Similarly, it is only in Suriname that 9 August 1890 is celebrated to mark the arrival of the first Javanese. This day too is explicitly characterized by cultural performance. Every year on the 9th of August Javanese people appear in ‘traditional dress’ and perform various ‘typically Javanese traditions’ such as *wayang* shows and gamelan and ‘pop-Jawa’ music. Yet the Javanese who chose to stay after their contracts expired have experienced a shared heritage as *Javaanse Surinamers* (Javanese Surinamese), a heritage not shared with Javanese Indonesians. As Pamela Allen noted in her study of Javanese cultural traditions in Suriname, it is a “requirement for an ethnic group to be able to demonstrate certain ‘markers’ (an original homeland, an

ethnic language, folklore, histories, cuisine and costume) in order to be considered part of the narrative of ‘racial utopia’ in Suriname” (ibid. 203; see also Tjon Sie Fat 2009).

In other words, the Surinamese process of nation-building was marked by a publicly displayed acknowledgement of ethnic difference. As I noted above, Surinamese-ness appears to hinge on an explicit celebration of cultural diversity. Indeed, according to Surinamese linguist Mr. Eersel (quoted in Brouwer 2008: 21) ethnic diversity *is* Surinamese-ness:

On a national day, when it is important to you to be Surinamese, you wear the dress of your own ethnic group. Everyone emphasizes their ethnicity and in doing so emphasizes the national Surinamese culture.

Staged against or effectively in a context of Suriname as Unity in Diversity then, how were doglas positioned? How did doglas in Nickerie position themselves? To most doglas I spoke with, ethnic commemoration days were important for what they referred to as “our shared history, for knowing how we came together to become Surinamese”. Some doglas referred to the daily newspapers reminding people of the national importance of ethnic commemoration days, arguing that “the typical Surinamese cultural diversity, multi-ethnicity and harmony strongly contributes to our value (*onze waarde*) and has had the result that according to international ratings Suriname is in the top ten of tourist destinations” (MA 2010: 5).

Yet to doglas these commemoration days were also moments of ethnic confirmation, of ethnic boundary fixation. Regardless of Suriname’s “multi-ethnicity” attracting tourists (of which there were very few in Nickerie), to some doglas the celebrations were moments both of inclusion and exclusion. With friends and relatives ushering them to come along and ‘join the fun’, doglas expressed both sympathy and discomfort. Their sympathy was multiple: it was sympathy with descendents of people who saw their lands and peoples claimed by European invaders during the seventeenth and twentieth centuries; sympathy with people who claimed ancestry with those subjected to the cruel slave trade before its abolishment in 1863; and

sympathy with descendents of Asian peoples who worked on the plantations in miserable circumstances as indentured labourers.

But there was also discomfort with ethnic celebration days because these singled out particular groups with presumably clear boundaries based on ‘shared heritage not shared by all’. With a mixture of sarcasm and dismissal there were doglas who said to me:

Which traditional dress should I wear during the big commemoration of Surinamese identity? If doglas were not given a dress when ethnicity was made in Suriname, then how are we expected to split up our ethnic heritage in a single dress?

Such reference to cultural dress resonates with the lyrics sung by the Trinidadian calypsonian *Mighty Dougl*a with which I opened this chapter. As I noted there, the idea of a dogla identity as ‘splitting’ into differentiated ‘national’ origins was also expressed in terms of not having an ‘ethnic flag’ and therefore “No Nation”. As I have argued in this chapter, the outspoken manifestation of ethnicity as a marker of Surinamese-ness finds its ‘roots’ in European colonialism. Indeed, dogla discourse in Nickerie was born out of the “critical event” of colonialism. As I will show in the subsequent chapters of this thesis however, dogla discourse is not simply about ethnic difference, not simply a matter of inclusion and exclusion. It is both about ethnic confirmation and negation, about boundary making and unmaking.

My dogla friend Ketty (see Introduction), who worked as a secondary school teacher at Nickerie’s Bueno Bibaz school, always showed up at cultural celebrations with a bright smile on her face and beautifully dressed in what she called “my cultural dress” (*mijn culturele kleding*). She sometimes wore a (Hindustani) sari, other times a *koto* with *angisa* (Creole dress with Creole headscarf, see Figure 4), or a (Javanese) sarong, or a Chinese dress, or a *pangi* (Maroon loincloth, see Figures 4 and 6), or ‘western’ jeans, without fussing about ‘difference’. She said she felt happy to have a choice of dress, that she enjoyed having the opportunity to choose from “so much beautiful cultural heritage”. It is this ambiguity in dogla discourse and dogla

belonging in Suriname's cultural process of postcolonial nation-building that this thesis is about.

Colonialism as Critical Event: Concluding Remarks

One of the problems of writing (about) history is that written accounts tend to punctuate specific moments in time as decisive of what 'the past' was like. The colonial making of ethnicity was, of course, not punctual but a complex process involving many actors over an extended period of time. Indeed, in some ways the European colonization of the Caribbean never ended, as Brackette Williams (1991) makes apparent with her discussion of the Anglophone 'presence' in Guyana as "hegemonic ghost". Perhaps European colonialism is difficult to 'end' in the Caribbean precisely because it cannot be contained as 'past experience', as 'past event'. As I have argued in this chapter, the colonial experience was the foundation of the recognition of ethnic identities in Suriname. The burden of the European plantation project in the Caribbean stretches much further than history as a particular moment (perhaps covering centuries) in the past because people continue to live through colonial referents of identity in many deeply interpenetrating spheres of life.

I have argued that the 'event' of Dutch colonialism has been critical in the making of ethnicity in Suriname. Suriname's population risks being represented as made up of 'given', essentialist ethnic groups – but the colonial encounter I have described in this chapter shows that ethnicity has first and foremost been a constructive process. Colonialism was a critical event to the making of ethnicity in Suriname because the people that were shipped into the country – as well as their descendants – faced renegotiations of cultural practices and hierarchical relations, an adjustment in their lifestyle and diet, and interactions with 'other' unfamiliar cultural customs and beliefs.

In other words, we should not underestimate how colonialism reframed Suriname's populations. Using Veena Das' explanation of "critical events" as sparking "new modes of action ... redefine[ing] traditional categories" (Das 1995: 6), in this chapter

I have argued that colonialism was a critical event for the way ethnic relations have been created in Suriname. Ethnic categories were constructed by reimaginings of community and culture by slaves and indentured labourers, given an impulse by ethnically specific colonial policies of education, and were also a product of emancipatory political movements. Furthermore, articulated through an ideology of Unity in Diversity, ethnic essentialism was crucial to people who were renegotiating familiarity and otherness in a new environment. The celebration of ethnic commemoration days in present-day Suriname illustrates people's continuous reference to the ethnic categories made during colonialism.

Chapter Two

The Ethnic Taboo and the Bouterse Taboo: National Politics and Dogla Voting in 2010

On the national election day of 25 May 2010, Nickerie had the atmosphere of a public holiday, with many people on the street, laughing, joking, and waving flags.¹⁸ This apparent joy turned more festive towards the end of the day when the election results were becoming clearer. In all the excitement buzzing around the town centre, I was enthusiastically hugged by Kishen, who over the previous months had gone to great lengths to describe the tiniest details of “our politics” to me – including of course some scandalous gossip about specific party members. The inked tip of his finger indicated that Kishen had cast his vote. He was happy because the Mega Combination (MC), led by the National Democratic Party (NDP), had achieved victory in Nickerie by getting three of the five parliamentary seats for the district. On the day of the election Kishen drove around Nickerie with the flag of the NDP tied to the rear window of his car, as many of his friends did (see Figure 7).

Like Kishen, most of the doglas I spoke to voted for Desi Bouterse’s NDP. What were the reasons for their overwhelming support for the NDP? Why was this nationalist party, with its foundations in the military dictatorship of the 1980s, apparently more popular than the ethnic parties that had for over half a century been the most powerful actors in Surinamese politics? How did Desi Bouterse become the country’s democratically elected President in 2010, despite his stained biography as controversial military ruler? Was it because of the NDP’s ethnically neutral politics? Did these elections reflect a reconsideration of the role of ethnicity in Suriname’s political nation-building process?

¹⁸ Parts of an earlier version of this chapter appear in a paper on Suriname’s 2010 elections (Marchand 2014).

Figure 7: NDP Flag on Car Window, Nieuw Nickerie



Photo by the author

Since the country's official independence in 1975, disagreements among politicians and citizens have centred on the subject of what a postcolonial Suriname might look like. Some have advocated a politically and socio-economically independent national unity, while others have called for the continuation of a system of ethnic powersharing that maintains close political and socio-economic relations to the Netherlands. The main question I address in this chapter is how we can understand ethnicity in Suriname's postcolonial politics in light of the recent presidential election of Desi Bouterse and the victory of his nationalist, 'ethnically neutral' party, the NDP.

Examining the 2010 election process, I focus on the mobilization of voters by politicians and the voting behaviour of doglas in Nickerie. I will show that ethnic mobilization strategies by political parties were instrumentally used, but that the behaviour of the electorate was not simply to "vote for people who look like you"

(*stem op mensen die op je lijken*), as some politicians phrased it. It was primarily motivated by a desire for political change. People in Nickerie tended to vote for specific personae, some out of ethnic clientelism, but also for promises of wider societal change – change that voters hoped would allow Suriname to move from being a colonial dependent to a nation in its own right.

I will argue that the 2010 elections are exemplary for the ways in which ethnicity has been essentialized but also rejected in Suriname's postcolonial process of nation-building. Bouterse presented an alternative to the ethnic status quo that did not rely on ethnic categories but on other criteria – criteria that most notably involved a lessening of Suriname's political and economic relation to the Netherlands. According to doglas who were supportive of Bouterse, the new Surinamese nationalism was to "stop pretending" that (*niet meer doen alsof*) there was unity in ethnic difference, and rather to form a unity working against the country's continuing dependence on the Netherlands. Doglas argued against the 'Bouterse taboo' – that Bouterse should not be involved in state affairs because of his stained military past. They used metaphors of the "child" and the "puppet" when explaining the relation of Suriname to the former colonizer. As Kishen phrased it:

The system of ethnic clientelism keeps Suriname dependent on the Netherlands. We are like a child that cannot grow up because ethnic elites keep firming up their Dutch connections for their own personal profit. With Bouterse we will no longer be a puppet of Dutch welfare economics (*poppetje van de Nederlandse welvaartseconomie*). Bouterse will privatize Suriname's assets; kick out foreign companies; allow us to benefit from what belongs to us. He will prioritize real independence.

Below, I will first discuss how people were mobilized by politicians in the run up to the elections of 25 May 2010. The 'taboo' of ethnic mobilization hides a more complex political situation that is not exclusively about ethnicity. The next part of the chapter is concerned with voting behaviour in Nickerie in 2010 and, amongst doglas, the apparent popularity of the NDP and of Bouterse in particular. In order to understand why the NDP was popular, I will then discuss the nationalist ideology of Desi Bouterse as a counter-move to the 'traditional' Surinamese party politics of ethnic clientelism. I continue with an account of what I have termed the 'Bouterse

taboo', with attention to the political climate since the country's official independence and up to the latest elections of 2010. In the concluding remarks, I return to my questioning of the popularity of Bouterse among doglas in Nickerie, and how my account of the 2010 elections reveals the role ethnicity has played in Suriname's postcolonial politics.

The Mobilization of Voters and the “Ethnic Taboo” in the Run Up To the 2010 Elections

Surinamese politicians have become increasingly reluctant to admit ethnically biased activity. Investigating the role of ethnicity and nationalism during the country's previous elections in May 2005, Anne Blanksma (2006) observed what he called “the ethnic taboo”. This taboo refers to the ethnic mobilization of voters by politicians who simultaneously denied that they were doing so, fearing the criticism that they were not loyal to the nation. According to Blanksma, following negative critiques from within Suriname, the *apanjaht* saying “vote for people who look like you” – originally coined by *topper* (leader) Paul Somohardjo of the Javanese *Pertjajah Luhur* (PL) party, but swiftly adopted by others – was no longer openly expressed. Only during party rallies was ethnicity sometimes explicitly addressed.

The months prior to the elections of May 2010 showed a recurrence of this ethnic taboo, in that many political parties still appeared to operate along ethnic lines while denying that they were doing so. The idea of *apanjaht* seemed outdated; I did not, for example, witness politicians playing upon fear. Elements of ethnic prejudice, however, were evident in the mobilization strategies of many parties. The closer the day of the election approached, the more politicians seemed to forget their announced dissatisfaction with an ethnicized voting system.

The ethnic mobilization of voters occurred in several ways. While presenting neutral mobilization strategies such as treating everyone, regardless of ethnic background, to ‘free’ meals, in some of his campaigns Somohardjo again referred to “people who look like you”. Furthermore, the PL's slogan “from ethnic party to national party”

lost credibility when they were strategically counting the number of Javanese in our and other neighbourhoods in Nickerie before deciding whether to organize a campaign there or not. The Maroon manned A-Combination did not hide its primary interest in the economic and emancipatory advancement and empowerment of Suriname's Maroons.¹⁹ They stressed that particular socio-economic attention to Maroons was needed because they had been politically marginalized by previous governments. In response, members of the NPS warned against participation of the A-Combination in the government because of their explicit Maroon loyalty and presumed lack of political experience.

Even when politicians were not so explicit in their language, nonetheless ethnic favouritism could be discerned in certain of their actions. It suddenly became important to the VHP to push through the paving of the roads in largely Hindustani residential areas of Nickerie, for example, noticeably 'forgetting' the roads where mostly Creoles resided. Actions such as these strongly influenced people's voting decisions. One of the most effective strategies in Nickerie seemed to be a politician's 'free gifts', such as promising people agricultural property or the legalization of land ownership, in the hope that these promises would then be met by a willingness to provide party support.

These 'gifts', however, seemed largely restricted to people within the ethnic patronage network of a politician. Amongst people attending my English language course at the Volkshogeschool Nickerie (see Marchand 2012), I noticed how tensions in the classroom rose when Javanese PL supporter Paula happily announced that her family had received a building permit from the Ministry of Spatial Planning, Land and Forest Management in Paramaribo, after a couple of months of "pushing the politicians". This ministry was at the time largely staffed by Javanese and Chinese PL politicians. From Hindustani and Creole people in the class came grunting responses to Paula's cheerfulness; they complained that they had been pushing and queuing and writing letters for years without any success.

¹⁹ In 2005 three Maroon parties, including former guerrilla leader Brunswijk's ABOP (*Algemene Bevrijdings- en Ontwikkelings Partij*; General Liberation and Development Party), had united in the *A-Combinatie* (A-Combination).

Another strategy of politicians was to focus their campaigns on certain districts in which they expected more ethnic support than in other districts. One of the curious characteristics of the Surinamese voting system is the skewed ratio between the number of elective seats and the number of voters per district. The number of seats per district dates from the 1940s when Suriname's population distribution was different. Since then, many people have moved from rural districts to the capital of Paramaribo, and the surrounding districts of Greater-Paramaribo and Wanica. In 2004 roughly a quarter of a million people – half of the Surinamese population – resided in the capital (ABS 2005). Yet there were only seventeen politicians, or thirty-three per cent of the fifty-one parliamentary seats, to be elected there. The contrast on the other end of the scale was the district of Coronie where two politicians, or almost four per cent of all seats, were to be elected by only 0.6 per cent of the population. Hence the value of a vote depended on the district, causing many politicians to campaign in 'easy' districts such as Brokopondo, Marowijne and Sipaliwini in the country's interior, which together comprised only twelve per cent of the electorate but eighteen per cent of the seats (Ramsoedh 2008). Nevertheless it was unlikely to see massive VHP campaigns in Maroon areas or ABOP rallies in Nickerie.

In interpreting these mobilization strategies, can we say that Suriname's 2010 elections were about ethnic consociationalism (see Chapter One)? Were ethnic categories meaningful? I suggest that indeed, they were, but only to a certain extent. The long-held idea that in Suriname's society ethnicity dominates practically all spheres of social life holds true in the minds of many Surinamese, including doglas. In 2010 there still appeared to be a meta-ideology of ethnic essentialism which was shared by most political party blocks and citizens alike. Yet, as I will show below, this ideology has been challenged by Bouterse's National Democratic Party (NDP) and its supporters.

The country's ethnic consociationalism was confirmed in that most political party leaders mapped themselves and their parties onto certain segments of society in an

ethnically biased us-versus-them fashion. This pattern of mobilizing the electorate seemed to create a social atmosphere of nepotism, or rather a nepotistically inspired pressure for people to vote ethnically, like a dominant family pressure on a somewhat larger scale. Despite the ethnic taboo in the mobilization of the electorate, the persistent urge to “vote for people who look like you” and associated actions of ethnic clientelism, revealed the ease of thinking ‘ethnically’, and assuming ethnic categories. The results of the elections of 25 May 2010, however, demonstrated a questioning of *apanjaht*, a questioning of the ethnicization in Suriname’s democracy. In the next part of the chapter I will turn to these election results and voting behaviour in Nickerie.

Voting Behaviour in Nickerie on 25 May 2010: Beating *Apanjaht*

The Statistical Results in Nickerie: Ethnic Voting?

In the run up to the 2010 elections there was a busy-bee atmosphere – closely followed by the local newspapers – of strategic block forming and de-forming. The 2010 elections eventually listed twenty-one parties of which four were independent and the others allied in five coalitions. The allocation of Parliamentary seats per coalition or independent party follows a complex mathematical logic of comparing and dividing the numbers of all votes across all coalitions and unallied parties (see Jadnanansing n.d). Many of the allied combinations in the run up to the elections seemed to serve primarily as mobilizing strategies for individual party politicians that lost their significance following the final allocation of seats in the new government.

Rather than presenting statistical information here on all of the Combinations, I focus on Bouterse’s NDP as part of the Mega Combination (MC) in Nickerie. I am interested in why the NDP was only entitled to one of the MC’s three seats in Nickerie despite the strongly expressed support for this party – and for its leader, Desi Bouterse – among people in this district.

In Nickerie there were five of the country's fifty-one seats being contested. All party combinations (and independent parties) campaigning in this district had therefore started out with a list of five candidates. Individual candidates were entitled to a seat if they reached the quota needed to guarantee a seat. That quota differed per district and was calculated depending on how many people went to the polling stations to cast their votes. In Nickerie the quota turned out to be somewhere around 2,500 votes. Candidates who did not reach the quota could obtain a seat through a logic of party-combination organization in which higher placed candidates on a combination's list (starting with number 1) benefited from the 'passing up' of votes from lower placed candidates (numbers 5, 4, ...) until they reached the quota, following which the 'excess' was then redistributed down the list for the next candidate (numbers 2, 3, ...) to add onto his/her votes until their individual quota was reached (if at all).

Following the final counts it was announced that the NDP-led Mega Combination (MC) had won three seats. The other two seats were won by the New Front (*Nieuw Front*, NF) and the People's Alliance (*Volksalliantie*, VA), respectively (see Figure 8). It was only the Hindustani candidate Soerdjan of the VHP – number five of the New Front list – who had been elected through preferential votes.

Figure 8: Table of Election Results for Nickerie District²⁰

	Elected MP	Combination	Party	Number of Votes
1	Soerdjan	NF	VHP	2745
2	Marsidih	VA	PL	1592
3	Doekhie	MC	NDP	1966
4	Lachman	MC	NS	2235
5	Wongsoredjo	MC	KTPI	910
Total				9448

Source: Nidhansingh (2010)

²⁰ To avoid potential confusions because of similarities in surname: Premdew Lachman, member of the party *Nieuw Suriname* and listed for the Mega Combination in Nickerie in 2010, was not Jagernath Lachmon, the founder of the VHP and influential proponent of the New Front's fraternization politics in the 1950s (see Chapter One), who died in 2001 (Khemradj 2002). KTPI: *Kaum Tani Persatuan Indonesia* (Indonesian Peasant Party).

In Nickerie, these results were interpreted as a victory for the MC but not necessarily for the NDP, since the NDP had obtained only one seat. According to electro technician and tennis trainer Dan Tjon Tjauw Liem, the NDP had, despite its ‘ethnically neutral’ approach, allowed the Surinamese electorate to vote ethnically:

The first candidate on the Mega Combination list was Doekhie, a Hindustani with the NDP. Second was Lachman, a Hindustani with NS, third Wongsoredjo, a Javanese with KTPI, fourth Abel, a Creole with the NDP, and fifth Ramdien, a Hindustani woman with the NDP. The MC’s voting advice was: “vote Abel”, which was a critically anti-ethnic move because Abel is Creole whereas the district is mostly Hindustani. The results show that people did not vote for Abel, because the three seats for the MC went to Doekhie, Lachman and Wongsoredjo. So the Nickerians voted ethnically.

Dan’s analysis and subsequent conclusion that “the Nickerians voted ethnically”, even within a party-block dominated by the ethnically neutral NDP, was echoed by several observers in the media with whom I spoke in both Nickerie and Paramaribo. The final allocation of the five seats in Nickerie caused many people to conclude that because Nickerians elected three Hindustani and two Javanese candidates, and none Creole, they had voted ethnically. People qualified this conclusion (largely informed by local newspapers and other media coverage) by saying that there were a lot more Hindustani and Javanese than Creole voters in Nickerie because there were fewer Creoles in the population and “because many Creoles do not vote”. According to the statistics for Nickerie’s population in the 2004 Census results, 21913 people (sixty per cent) self-identified as Hindustani, 6114 (seventeen per cent) as Javanese, 3551 (ten per cent) as Creole and 3272 (nine per cent) as mixed (calculated from Table 7 in ABS 2006: 30). When I asked my neighbours how they thought “mixed people” had voted, they put doglas together with Creoles as “unlikely to vote”.

A closer analysis of the election process in Nickerie, however, shows a more complex picture regarding ethnic voting than simply analyzing the final allocation of seats alone. Before paying attention to my qualitative account of Nickerian voters (most Creoles and doglas also voted, see below), let’s first take a closer statistical

look at the candidates listed by the MC before settling for stereotypical local conclusions that the Nickerians voted ethnically. As I will show, many people *did* vote for Abel. According to the statistics Abel even got more votes than the NDP's other two candidates, 'despite' him being Creole and the other two candidates Hindustani. Consider Figure 9 below:

Figure 9: Table of Number of Votes for the Candidates Listed for the MC in Nickerie

List Position	Name	Party	Number of Votes
1	Doekhie	NDP	1966
2	Lachman	NS	2235
3	Wongsoredjo	KTPI	910
4	Abel	NDP	2210
5	Ramdien	NDP	1569
Total			8890

Source: Nickerie.Net / NSS 2010

When we look at the votes for the listed NDP members, we see that Nickerians did follow the MC's advice to vote for Abel. Lachman (NS) topped him only by 25 votes, and if Abel had received a few hundred more votes, he would have won a seat through preferential votes like Soerdjan of the VHP (see Figure 8). Abel would have been entitled to a seat as well if he had been placed as number three rather than four on the list (if Lachman had been placed at number four, he would not have won his seat, despite receiving the most MC votes). As none of the MC candidates won enough preferential votes, the votes from the bottom of the list (starting with Ramdien, then Abel) were added to the number one of the list (Doekhie), and when Doekhie's count reached the quota, the remaining excess votes then dripped down to numbers two (Lachman) and three (Wongsoredjo).

This result exposes the insecurity of inter-party block formations both for politicians and voters, as the number of votes for a party member did not guarantee a statistically equivalent chance of getting a parliamentary seat. As Figure 9 shows, the total number of votes for the NDP in Nickerie was 1966 (Doekhie) + 2210 (Abel) +

1569 (Ramdien) = 5745, or almost thirty-two per cent of all Nickerie's 18,042 votes; but the NDP got only one of the district's five seats.²¹

The disappointment amongst doglas that there was only one seat for the NDP in Nickerie strengthened their assumption that people had voted ethnically. The countrywide election results of 2010, however (see below), indicate that the Surinamese social and political system was not as ethnic as it may have been. Although ethnic voting did occur, other people challenged *apanjaht*. In the next section I will show in what ways doglas questioned the idea of *apanjaht*. More generally, the overall victory of the NDP in 2010 signalled that an increasing number of citizens were questioning Suriname's ethnic consociationalism.

Age, Ideology, Flags and Charismatic Leaders: Dogla Voting?

During an interview held at her home courtyard in Nickerie in August 2009, NPS Member of Parliament Carmelita Ferreira told me:

In Suriname we do not want conflicts about ethnicity, not like Guyana. In our political system we need to emphasize ambitions, our goals for the future. We need to engage more with each other. If we place ethnic boundaries against others, then we also limit ourselves.

In the 2010 elections Ferreira was candidate number two on the New Front list. Many months before these elections, she had given me the following prognosis of how doglas were going to vote:

Suriname's New Front leaders are old. They have been in the government for a long time. When the old leaders retire Suriname will become more unified. The youth don't emphasize ethnic divisions. Look, these Javanese and Hindustani boys are joining our so-called "negro-party", the NPS. I see myself as Creole, but I am also dogla. Our party is becoming multi-ethnic and therefore of interest also to doglas.

Was the NPS of interest to doglas? If so, why did the majority of doglas I spoke with tell me that they voted for Bouterse's NDP? According to them, the main reason *not*

²¹ In total 80,92 per cent (or 18,042 voters) of the Nickerian electorate voted in 2010. See www.surinaamseverkiezingen.com/uitslagen.aspx?d=3 [accessed 21 January 2013]

to vote for the NPS was – as Ferreira had said – that the New Front government had been in power long enough. They expressed their political stance in youthful frustration with the ethnicized status quo. To quote Jordan, a biology student: “Nothing in this country will ever change if we stick eternally to fraternizing alliances based on ethnic exclusivity”. Or, as my Hindustani friend Varsha phrased it (echoed by several doglas): “Some people say that Venetiaan [NPS] has ten clean fingers because he has not made mistakes in his position as Suriname’s president [serving three five-year terms]. Others say he has ten clean fingers because he didn’t change anything”.

Apart from these concerns with the age or inertia of New Front politicians, there were differences of opinion between doglas who had and those who had not been affected by the military dictatorship of the 1980s (see below). Young, adolescent doglas I spoke to voted for the NDP mainly because of its ethnically neutral approach. Dahlia, for example, a nurse at the Nickerie hospital, said: “Doglas do not fit into ethnic politics. The NDP solves that problem.” Stan, a young worker at Suriname’s telephone company Telesur, was more explicit: “With Bouterse we will become a dogla land, no more race issues, everyone impure like me, everyone Surinamese!”

Some older doglas, however, expressed reservations against Bouterse, and ambiguous feelings about “the old system” as well. According to Patrick, a retired school teacher:

Young people don’t realize how difficult the military period was. They don’t have memories of the curfews. We were not allowed to gather on the street with more than four persons. One onion had to last weeks for the whole family. There was nothing in the shops. Now we can buy everything. Youthful innocence just takes that for granted. My sister voted NPS, in fear of the military. I did not vote. I don’t know what is best for this country. To continue voting for the old system is not helping our process of independence. The yoke of colonialism weighs heavily upon Suriname.

Patrick’s reference to colonialism popped up in several conversations I had with doglas. They said that the importance of decolonization and nation-building to

people in Suriname was often overlooked by people from the Netherlands – including Surinamese people residing in the Netherlands. “The process of defining our own identity is political but it is also emotional. You are Dutch and do not have to think about it”, they told me. “We are Surinamese, but still like children to the Dutch. We don’t want to be children anymore, we want to grow up and have significance on our own.”

These conversations about Dutch colonialism and its lasting pressure on Surinamese identity-making deeply impacted me, both on a personal level and ethnographically. On a personal level, I struggled with the direct link people made between being Dutch and colonialism. On an ethnographic level, these conversations made me realize that Surinamese politics certainly was not only about ethnic relations, but also about definitions of the national. On both levels, it highlighted the abstractness of thinking in terms of ‘pre’-independence, ‘post’-colonialism and ‘trans’-national suffixes.²² As Gert Oostindie noted, “the question [of] how the national identity is to be defined, and who decides this ... takes place in the context of a decolonisation process ... that still appears unfinished” (2000: 182). Whereas the relation between Suriname and the Netherlands has been termed “transnational” (e.g. see Gowricharn 2003), then, perhaps Suriname’s nation-building process is not about transcending national categories. A common complaint running throughout the district of Nickerie was by people saying “We have not yet established our own nation, therefore we cannot move on”.

Furthermore, doglas in Nickerie put the local popularity of Bouterse in a different perspective. Dogla considerations regarding ‘nationalist’ voting were not only with reference to the military period. Indeed, the symbolism of doglas not having a flag (see Chapter One) was confounded several times in the months before the 2010 elections. With the day of the election approaching, many Nickerian families had planted one or more of the big party flags in their garden. While some seemed to

²² My problem with ‘pre’ and ‘post’ suffixes (likewise in other contexts such as ‘post-conflict’ and ‘post-modernity’) is that they are ordering devices that mark events and timeframes with a beginning and an end. What ‘is’ in between that beginning and end, however, often seems contested both in definition and boundaries.

stick to their choice of a single party such as the red star of the PL, others gathered several different flags to represent their interest in an allied combination of different parties, such as the NF's combination of VHP, NPS and SPA, as the *brom* (scooter) in Figure 10 shows.²³

Figure 10: New Front Flags on *Brom*



Photo by the author

The flag on a *brom* or in someone's garden did not necessarily give an outsider any clue of what people were going to vote. According to some people, planting a flag in their garden signalled support for a political party. Yet many Nickerians, and not only doglas, felt that their identity could not be captured by a particular flag. Their

²³ SPA: *Surinaamse Partij van de Arbeid* (Surinamese Labour Party)

identity was more than, say, ‘orange and elephant’ Hindustani, or ‘red star’ Javanese, or ‘green and flaming torch’ Creole (see Figure 11). Their identity was a bit of all of that by being Surinamese.

Figure 11: 'Dogla' Flag of Four Major Parties in Surinamese Politics



Stuart's compilation of four of our photos

My overall impression was that regardless of their political orientation, many people simply took advantage of party bribing strategies. Most people changed the flag several times, usually depending on which party had lately given them a valued present, such as the entitlement to a piece of agricultural land or simply a few decent meals distributed ‘for free’.

Clearly, some voters were involved in the ethnic mobilizations of politicians through patron-client networks. Members of the Lalkoe family, for instance, explained their vote for Soerdjan (VHP) to me: “because we know them, and they know us”. I came to know the family Lalkoe fairly well during my time in Nickerie. They seemed to appreciate our company in their family house, particularly during special occasions such as *Holi Phagwa*, weddings, and other celebrations and rituals that took place at

the house; and it was beyond question that we visited “Pa” Lalkoe (the male head of the family) for his “seventy birthdays” ceremony. But also if there were no particular celebrations they always stopped me when I cycled past, urging me to have a meal with them. The Lalkoes were by their neighbours described as strictly orthodox Sanatan Dharm Hindus.

I first heard the phrase “because we know them, and they know us” (*omdat we ze kennen, en zij kennen ons*) in the house of the Lalkoe family. This phrase, or at least its sentiment of ‘voting for familiarity’, was echoed in many households in the Hindustani households I visited in the polders. My Hindustani friend Sandra – married into the Lalkoe family – told me that the NDP was not met with disapproval among Hindustani people, but that many of the poorer rice farmers in these polders were subjected to clientelist obligations to Hindustani (VHP) government officials.

However, there was also another way in which people ‘judged’ politicians: in everyday gossip, people were zooming in on politicians’ private lives, their virtues and crimes and, most of all, their charisma. Indeed, a prominent factor influencing voting behaviour of many Nickerians was the societal importance of political personae. Doglas were particularly impressed by Desi Bouterse’s political rhetoric, as one of my visits to Tina’s house illustrates:

Whereas usually most of Tina’s ‘mixed’ family members were outside in the hammocks on the cool, shady ground underneath the house, on this occasion my “*klop klop!*” was answered by the head of Tina’s youngest son popping through the curtain at the top of the staircase.²⁴ When he saw me he waved me up to the house, whispering: “Shh, come Iris, listen to him!” They were watching a speech of Bouterse on the television, broadcasted from Paramaribo. Tina pushed me onto a chair and said, leaning over my shoulder: “He is intelligent and knows about the world. He speaks well. He has a message, an ideology. He knows what is best for the future of Suriname.” Every now and then Tina’s four children, their two cousins and

²⁴ Translation: “knock knock!” As most houses did not have a doorbell and as people were usually in their garden or on their veranda or courtyard, or at least had all their doors and windows open, the Nickerian way of knocking on someone’s door was done by voice rather than knuckles.

a handful of other relatives and neighbours in the room cracked up in laughter about a joke Bouterse had made. Tina's daughter, while feeding sweet potato to her impatient toddler, said: "He says it so funny but he is absolutely right!" With spells of rain clattering on the aluminium roof, the volume of the television went up. Following the speech, applauded by a large and loudly cheering audience in Paramaribo dressed in the purple T-shirts of the NDP and waving the NDP flag, Tina's husband said, to nobody in particular: "This is our man. He embodies the power Suriname needs."

The way Tina's family reacted to Bouterse's speech echoed through Nickerie. Whereas within some families there were generational disagreements about which leader was best, the importance of a political persona over ethnic affiliations, or the importance of charisma and promise, was a dominant element in most considerations of whom to vote for or whether to vote at all. In these accounts Bouterse was often staged as the best *topper* ('leader'). Ricardo, a chemistry teacher at Nickerie's Natin College said that Bouterse wanted to give the Surinamese people "real independence":

We no longer want to be puppets of Dutch colonialism. We have to move onto real independence. Bouterse is the man who can make us do it. If anyone is the prototype of what it means to be Surinamese, it is Bouterse. He always has been. When his military attempt at gaining state power proved ineffective, he moved onto learning the political game of democracy.

Ricardo gave political recognition of Bouterse that contrasted explicitly with the 'Bouterse taboo' (see below) in New Front and Dutch accounts of how to govern Suriname 'well'.

Ricardo was not alone in the explanation of his vote. More generally, doglas in Nickerie addressed the limitations of a political system that did not accommodate wider societal concerns because of its insistent ethnic clientelism. Thinking about what it meant to be Surinamese, they questioned what unity there could be in ethnic diversity. By claiming that "mixed-race people are true Surinamese" (*mensen van gemengd ras zijn echte Surinamers*), doglas prioritized hybridity over ethnic

essentialism in their definition of Surinamese-ness. With their vote for the NDP, they opposed the colonially established status quo of ethnic clientelism in Surinamese politics. Their hope for societal change was personified in the ambiguous political figure of Desi Bouterse, who rejected references to ethnicity in definitions of the Surinamese nation. Bouterse did not fit into Suriname's ethnic structure of *apanjaht* politics, which gave him appeal among dogla voters.

In embodying an opposition to the colonially established status quo, the political figure of Bouterse shares similarities with the political figure of Bolivian President Evo Morales. According to Andrew Canessa, the presidential election of Evo Morales in 2005 is central to Bolivia's "indigenous awakening" (2007b: 206). Morales personifies "an indigenous positioning [among people who] have been excluded from the processes of colonization and globalization [and] historically excluded from the nation state" (ibid. 207). As such, Bolivia's "new indigenous positioning is as much a claim to justice as it is an assertion of ethnicity" (Canessa 2007a: 158).

Of course, the emergence of indigeneity in Bolivia differs markedly from the rejection of ethnic clientelism among doglas in Suriname. The relatively comfortable position of doglas in the Surinamese state is not comparable to the political and socio-economic marginalization and discrimination of "indigenous" Bolivians. Perhaps doglas have been enjoying a certain 'comfort' precisely because of their ambiguity in claiming a mixed-ness that is central to maintaining Suriname's ethnic divisions. In Bolivia, it is precisely the political power and cultural orientation of an urban *mestizo* (and white) class that is opposed with the election of Morales (Canessa 2007a).

My comparison between the cases of Bolivia and Suriname, however, concerns what Canessa (2007a) termed "a postcolonial turn": the elections of both Morales and Bouterse, in their respective countries, signal a nationalist reorientation towards state resources; a break with previous liberal economic policies – with vulnerability to world markets that has allowed state elites to intensify social inequalities.

Furthermore, “[t]he changes [Morales] is proposing ... are prompting a widespread reevaluation of some of the basic ideas of what it means to be Bolivian” (ibid. 155). In Suriname, the political figure of Bouterse symbolized – to Douglas in Nickerie at least – a rejection of ethnicity, of Unity in Diversity, which requires a rethinking of what it means to be Surinamese.

In Suriname’s elections of 25 May 2010, the counting of votes had resulted in twenty-three seats for the Mega Combination; fourteen for the New Front; seven for the A-Combination; six for the People’s Alliance; and a single seat for Carl Breeveld’s independent party, DOE (*Democratie door Ontwikkeling en Eenheid*; Democracy through Development and Unity).²⁵ The Mega Combination needed an additional eleven seats to achieve the two-thirds majority needed to form the government. A government allying Bouterse with the New Front was beyond negotiation. A couple of months of stormy discussions eventually resulted in an alliance of the Mega Combination with Brunswijk’s A-Combination and Somohardjo’s People’s Alliance. The New Front withdrew to the opposition. Bouterse’s presidency was supported by a sufficient majority of the newly elected Surinamese parliament.

In Suriname the President is not elected by the general population but by The National Assembly (*De Nationale Assemblee*, DNP), a group of fifty-one representatives who are democratically elected by the population (both those in the government and those in the opposition). If the National Assembly cannot decide (in a maximum of two rounds) on a President with a two-thirds majority of votes (thirty-four of fifty-one), then the decision is transferred to the *Verenigde Volks Vergadering* (‘United People Meeting’, VVV), which is a group of almost eight hundred people consisting of the members of the National Assembly plus all locally elected politicians in the districts and “departments” (*ressorten*). The VVV then needs to decide on the President with an ordinary (over fifty percent) majority vote (Khemradj 2002).

²⁵ See www.surinaamseverkiezingen.com for an overview of all election results. [accessed 21 January 2013]

Two weeks after the Surinamese elections, on 8 June 2010, the front page of the daily paper *Times of Suriname* led with the headline, “Bouterse the most popular politician”:

Desi Bouterse, chairman of the Mega Combination (MC) is the most popular politician in Suriname. ... The election results show that countrywide Bouterse obtained most votes, being 18335. ... Lothar Boksteen, chairman of the CHS [*Centraal Hoofdstembureau*: Central Main Polling Station] announced yesterday at the public meeting that at the elections of 2010 reached a historical turnout of 75.4 per cent of all voters on the electoral roll.

This “historical turnout” of voters indicates a renewed interest in Suriname’s state politics. A prominent complaint during previous elections was the lack of popular interest in politics, resulting in a “democratic deficiency” – meaning that the population was not participating enough to obtain a reflection of the overall population in the government (Gowricharn 2003; Ramsodh 2008: 311). That Bouterse was “the most popular” politician in these elections further indicates that people were not just voting NDP, but for Bouterse himself. Many Nickerie voters turned a blind eye towards accusations against Bouterse for murder and his alleged leading role in the country’s international drug trade (see below). They said that he did what he had to do “because of the circumstances”, or believed that he had changed his behaviour over the years. Bouterse’s display of wittiness and charisma coupled with his promise of political change helped the NDP’s success in 2010.

But what did this promise of political change contain? What was the ideology, the argument in Bouterse’s political message that would give “real independence” to Suriname and the Surinamese? Paul Tjon Sie Fat noted that “support of the NDP reflects resistance to class dominance and *apanjaht* clientelism as a mechanism of social mobility, especially in NDP appeals to popular culture and the attraction of Bouterse’s hustler image” (2009: 20), adding in a footnote:

Anti-Apanjaht parties and movements provide no single alternative national ideology. In the case of the NDP, despite the fact that its party ideologues consistently and uniquely produce party programmes, NDP narratives are based on populist, patriotic rhetoric derived from leftist interpretations of Surinamese nationalism, and variations on ‘out with the rascals!’ (ibid.)

According to Douglas in Nickerie, however, the “anti-*apanjaht*” NDP *did* have an “alternative national ideology”, which was equated with Bouterse. If we want to understand people’s voting behaviour in 2010, we need to be aware of what it is that Bouterse was resisting.

Both in his military and democratic nationalism Bouterse never was a “puppet of colonialism”. He was a man charged in 2000 by a Dutch court with a prison sentence of eleven years because of his role in international drugs trade and who has in the Netherlands been the main criminal suspect of the “December killings” (see below) (Buddingh’ 2012; Gowricharn 2003). He is a man currently protected by international law because he cannot be arrested for charges by the Netherlands in his role as Suriname’s president. He is a man who did not fear Dutch accusations and fought for Suriname to be ‘out of’ the Netherlands. Below, I will turn to the political figure of Desiré Delano Bouterse, and how his actions demonstrate not the Dutch version of Suriname’s ‘independence’, but an anti-imperialist, Surinamese nationalism.

Desi Bouterse’s Nationalism

The political campaign of the Bouterse-led NDP in the run up to the 2010 elections differed from ethnically-inspired attempts to mobilize the Surinamese electorate because of its nationalist approach, finding its roots in a growing antagonism towards the country’s former colonizer, the Netherlands. In his analysis of the elections in 2005, Anne Blanksma (2006) noted that Bouterse campaigned strongly against the ‘neo-colonial’ influence of the Netherlands. According to Blanksma, members of the NDP suggested that Suriname under the New Front had been “begging” from the Netherlands, which prevented Suriname from “standing on her own legs” (*op eigen benen staan*); and therefore preventing ‘real’ independence (ibid. 161).

In 2010, Bouterse’s campaigns were again marked by strong opposition to Dutch interference in Surinamese affairs. In sweeping speeches, Bouterse argued that the ethnicization of Surinamese politics was a colonial strategy of the Dutch who, in his

view, had been emphasizing the population's ethnic segmentation deliberately in order to keep Suriname's political leaders weak and dependent. He repeatedly referred to the Dutch government as an enemy to all Surinamese, because it had been preventing national unity for so long.

Bouterse also challenged the lack of nationalism in Suriname's *apanjaht* structure of ethnic powersharing. His rhetoric exposed the 'ethnic taboo' as a political paradox, with Suriname's political actors claiming to represent national unity through ethnic clientelism. Individually, most Surinamese parties claimed ethnic specificity, whereas the alliances they formed required inter-ethnic cooperation. In this sense, Suriname's party combinations were like political doglas – the New Front in particular. In other words, if there was a taboo on making explicit ethnic claims behind 'the nation', Suriname's consociationalist system of multi-party block forming presented an ambiguity between a celebration of ethnic pluralism and ideologies of nationalism as a state of 'cultural homogenization'.

Understandings of nationalism as a process of cultural homogenization tend to find their roots in Europe, 'aided' by the colonial project (Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm 2012).²⁶ Anthropology's most influential theorist on nationalism, Benedict Anderson, has described nations as "imagined political communities – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (1991: 6). Anderson traced nationalist ideology to popular movements in nineteenth-century Europe, influenced by resistance in the colonial Americas against the European metropolis. It was aided by linguistic unifications as "vernacular languages-of-state" (ibid. 65, 78).

Suriname's *apanjaht* ideology has not been a form of anti-imperialist resistance, but rather a means of *continuing* the colonially-informed political imagination. As Paul Tjon Sie Fat noted:

²⁶ The literature on nationalism and ethnicity is immense and expanding. Craig Calhoun (1993) presents a comprehensive entry to an overview of the sociological literature on ethnicity and nationalism. See also the extensive work of Anthony Smith (e.g. 1981, 1986, 2000) and writings by Balibar and Wallerstein (1991), Brubaker (1996), Eriksen (1993), Gellner (1983), Hobsbawm and Kertzer (1992) and Williams (1989), amongst many others.

Democratization in Suriname was not brought about by a nationalist and anti-colonial struggle but was imposed by the Dutch views of the modern nation-state ... Nationalism – in the sense of an ideology and discourse praising the idea of a Surinamese nation – had never been a focus of collective identity and imagination in Suriname. (2009: 14)

Moving out of a tunnel vision of *apanjaht* politics, however, it is clear that anti-imperialist nationalism has not been absent from Suriname's political development. That is, if we take Bouterse seriously: the rebel, the criminal, the hero, or the embodiment of thirty-plus years of opposing Suriname's 'independent dependence' on Dutch rule.

Whereas Bouterse left no room for doubt regarding his stance towards the Netherlands as the 'pest' of Suriname, his ideas about ethnicity were unclear. In his speeches he synthesized several cultural streams, priding his own origins as representing a mixture of – among others – Amerindian, Creole, and Hindustani heritage. But it was unclear how 'dogla identity' fitted into his national ideology. According to Tjon Sie Fat:

The NDP remains ambiguous with regard to ethnicity. It is trans-ethnic in that it bridges ethnic divisions exploited by *apanjaht* parties, and it is pan-ethnic in its attempts to access support from the widest possible range of ethnic segments. However, with regard to its ideal of the Surinamese Nation, it is not very clear if the NDP is mono-ethnic (everyone becoming 'Surinamese', implying some type of assimilation) or non-ethnic (mirroring the nationalism of the Surinamese State in which ethnicity is subversive). (2009: 20)

Based on Bouterse's ideologically consistent party programmes and the overall impression I got from NDP members and supporters in Nickerie and Paramaribo, I suggest that while Bouterse did not deny Suriname's ethnic diversity, the question of whether 'the national' should be "mono-ethnic" or "non-ethnic" (see Tjon Sie Fat quoted above) is irrelevant to his nationalist rhetoric. And perhaps there is no clear dualism. To conceive of national identity and ethnicity in terms of clearly delineated boundaries – implying either cultural homogenization or a denial thereof – seems an analytical and also political simplification of the various cross-cutting sociological levels on which power relations are negotiated (Williams 1989).

Contrary to an '*apanjaht* unity', Bouterse approached 'the national' from a socialist standpoint, seeking to break a colonial heritage of ethnic politics. Indeed, although *apanjaht* politics developed through class struggles for empowerment, it was also an ethnically biased structure in which those in power maintained ethnic cleavages. Of course, power imbalances have always been too complex to reduce to ethnicity. Social mobility has been achieved primarily by those with a colonial class advantage; the closer to the colonial government, the more prospects for personal enrichment. According to Douglas in Nickerie, it was primarily this persistent 'neo-colonial' distribution of power in (and over) Suriname which Bouterse could overthrow.

In the decades prior to the elections of 2005 and 2010, Bouterse's NDP had not been alone in advancing a nationalist argument against the colonial 'tradition' of ethnic class politics. In the Cold War climate of the 1950s and 1960s, Surinamese students and members of labour movements in the Netherlands had carried leftist ideals to the foreground of Surinamese politics but "were branded unacceptable 'leftist' challenges to the colonial status quo" (Meel 1998; Tjon Sie Fat 2009: 19-20). While several leftist parties formed, their influence was small against the powerful block of elites thriving on ethnic clientelism. As I will show in the next section, Bouterse responded more powerfully to the colonial status quo: with a coup d'état.

From Military Dictator to President: the 'Bouterse Taboo'

Following the country's official independence in 1975, an increasingly crippling economic situation marked by inflation and corruption caused the *apanjaht* elite cartels to lose political credibility. Many Surinamese attributed the economic deterioration of their daily lives and their downward-spiralling hopes for future prosperity to the newly independent, poorly functioning government. A 'cocktail' of incompetent state governance, continuing ethnic disagreements between Creole and Hindustani political actors, and leftist disgruntlement from the Netherlands and Suriname's smaller parties meant that the Surinamese population was not unsympathetic when Suriname's (largely Creole) National Army carried out a coup d'état on 25 February 1980 (Oostindie 2000). In the words of Ralph Premdas:

Consociationalism had degenerated into a demoralizing shouting match between two camps of token power-sharers. Thus, it was a matter of general relief, if not enthusiasm, when, in February 1980, a group of young non-commissioned officers, led by a sports instructor named Desi (re) Bouterse, took over the government. (1993: 68)

In May of that year, Sergeant Bouterse claimed power over the country and declared martial law. To celebrate the overturn of *apanjaht* consociationalism and ethnic clientelism, 25 February was proclaimed Liberation Day (Meel 1998; Tjon Sie Fat 2009) and Bouterse announced an anti-colonial revolution along socialist lines (Khemradj 2002; Mendes 2001; Ramsodh 2001). Gert Oostindie illustratively observed:

In the 1980s the Bouterse military regime took on a concrete nation-building project. Slogans and advertising posters more or less copied from Cuba appeared in Paramaribo and elsewhere in Suriname. A unified Surinamese people, heroic in social-realist style, gathered itself behind the banners of production, unity and contest. The concept of centuries of struggle against colonialism and imperialism was introduced, culminating in the ‘triumph of the revolution’. This again strongly Cuban-inspired blueprint was expressed in the brightly coloured historical panels that had been placed in the garden in front of the presidential palace. The continuity went from heroic Amerindians, Maroons, slaves and indentured labourers via Anton de Kom to the military. A dominant enemy, the Netherlands, gave coherence to it all (2000: 316-7).

In the first years following the coup, the leftist parties “joined the military rulers in the Revolutionary Front [as] military and leftists remained each other’s only alternative coalition partner” (Tjon Sie Fat 2009: 19-20). They soon became disillusioned when they realized that the Surinamese population suffered from violence and repression at the hand of the army. With Dutch development aid withdrawn following the coup, the country’s economy informalized, drawing revenue from the international cocaine trade and “a booming black market” (Haenen 1999: 445; Price 1995). Bouterse’s operation *Schoon Schip* (“Clean Sweep”) expelled around five thousand Guyanese and Haitian workers from Suriname “to protect the Surinamese labour market and guarantee national security” (Meel 2001: 143). On 8 December 1982, Bouterse was implicated in the arrest, subsequent torture and alleged execution of fifteen prominent intellectuals and unionists opposing the

revolution. This incident is commonly known as the “December killings” or *December moorden* (Hoogbergen and Kruijt 2006: 188; Ramsodh 2001).

Initially the military intervention was applauded by Maroons and Amerindians in particular because it gave them prospects for emancipation, when they had long felt “disqualified” and excluded from the ethnic Front politics (Oostindie 2000: 316). Disenchanted with the actual realities unfolding in Paramaribo, however, a Maroon guerrilla force called “Jungle Commandos” (Price 1995: 442), led by Bouterse’s former army recruit Ronnie Brunswijk, sought to overpower Suriname’s national army. The Jungle Commandos were morally and financially supported by resistance groups against Bouterse in the Netherlands (Khemradj 2002). Bouterse responded by mobilizing the army to the largely Maroon Moengo district in Eastern Suriname. This mobilization initiated a six year long inland war (*binnenlandse oorlog*), which also drew in Amerindians. Killings, torture, the destruction of Maroon villages and the violent chaos of these years caused thousands of Maroons to flee to neighbouring French Guiana (Hoogbergen and Kruijt 2006; Price 1995; Ramsodh 2001).

The war in the interior broke Suriname’s last hopes for Bouterse’s Revolutionary Front. Admitting defeat, in 1987 Bouterse agreed to the formation of a civil constitution based on democratic elections and announced his newly initiated party, the National Democratic Party (NDP) (Khemradj 2002). The former *apanjaht* leaders resumed their practice of ‘ethnic nationalism’.

However, the relationship between Hindustani and Creole allies had become embittered over the growth of the informal economy, which continued even after the resumption of civil rule. According to Oostindie, “not only the military enriched itself in the process, but also a group of mostly Hindustani business people”, causing an “ethnic grudge” among Creoles against the Hindustani population. The Creole elite had been heavily affected by the collapse of the formal State sectors in which they historically held most positions (2000: 192-3).

Furthermore, the return to civil democracy was fragile because the fear of Bouterse's military power was still strong. This fear, notably among politicians, was demonstrated by what is often described as "the telephone coup". In December 1990, Bouterse called the cabinet and said that he felt elected president Shankar (VHP) did not govern well. He pushed forward his NDP member, Jules Wijdenbosch, as the new President (Hoogbergen and Kruijt 2006; Khemradj 2002; Price 1995; Ramsodh 2001). Although Wijdenbosch was soon voted away in hurriedly called elections a year later, Bouterse continued his opposition against the New Front's dependence on Dutch financial aid and their perceived powerlessness without it – which prevented them, according to Bouterse and the smaller leftist parties, from building a new, non-colonial nation.

Following Bouterse's coup d'état and his military 'suspension of democracy' in the 1980s, the Netherlands froze its financial development aid. In Suriname, the withdrawal of Dutch aid set in motion a questioning not of Bouterse, however, but of the righteousness – or desirability – of the politics of ethnic clientelism covered up by the country's continuing reliance on economic aid from the former colonizer. Upon independence in 1975, the Netherlands had given Suriname "a golden handshake of 3.5 billion Dutch guilders (1.7 billion US dollars)" to aid the country's economic development (Buddingh' 2001; Helman 1995 [1983]; Oostindie 2000; Ramsodh 2001: 101). However generous a gesture this may seem – neighbouring Guyana did not receive a penny upon their independence from the British (Buddingh' 2001) – the Netherlands reserved the right to dictate how the money was spent and, in the end, Suriname's local economic sector hardly benefited from it.

As with the previous *Welvaartsfonds* (Welfare Fund), established in 1947 to aid Suriname's economic development, Dutch financial aid again proved hardly beneficial to the Surinamese population. Large sums of the 1975 'independence aid' were used for a railway project that was never completed; and foreign rather than Surinamese engineers turned rich from house-building and other construction projects and companies – such as the Dutch forestry company Bruynzeel, the Dutch mining company Billiton and the American aluminium company Alcoa (Buddingh'

2001; Jansen van Galen 1995; Ramsodh 2001). According to Hans Ramsodh, the “Dutch-Surinamese development cooperation since independence may be characterised as a political and economic failure” (2001: 83). Hans Buddingh’ concurs with this view, concluding that “Dutch development assistance has contributed a great deal to political and economic inertia-ness in Suriname” leaving Suriname with an estimated “foreign debt of 400 to 500 million US dollars” (2001: 87-8).

Gert Oostindie (2000) sheds a somewhat different light on the matter. In his interpretation, postcolonial leaders expect the role of the former colonizer to be a donor, but not a meddler. Oostindie called this expectation the paradox of the ‘successful’ Dutchification policies in the nineteenth century; the Dutch authorities regretted these policies a century later because of the overwhelming orientation of the Surinamese population to the Netherlands, rather than to their Caribbean and Latin-American neighbours (ibid. 311). The colonially established status quo Bouterse is seeking to overthrow includes the orientation of Surinamese people to the Netherlands. In his speeches before and following the 2010 elections he repeatedly stressed that Suriname should strengthen relations with regional neighbours – most notably socialist ones such as Cuba and Venezuela.

Following the freezing of Dutch aid during the military and “telephone coup” period, the New Front government of President Venetiaan (NPS) elected in 1991 (Venetiaan I, 1991-1996), was exemplary for the persistent disagreement between Bouterse and the New Front concerning the role of the Netherlands in Suriname. In 1992 Ronald Venetiaan – strongly supported by Lachman, the historically influential VHP leader (see Chapter One) – established the *Raamverdrag* (Draft Treaty). With this treaty Suriname resumed its economic relation with the Netherlands – or its ‘dependency’, according to Bouterse (Khemradj 2002; Schalkwijk 1994).

Bouterse is amongst the most controversial political figures in Surinamese history. Disbelief and confusion over how Bouterse had managed to become Suriname’s democratically elected president in 2010 – in spite of a legacy of military violence

and cocaine-trading – echoed throughout the Netherlands. Given the country's history of the internal war, it was not just ironic but incomprehensible – both in the Netherlands and in certain circles in Suriname – that it was Brunswijk with whom Bouterse agreed to form a government. The Dutch newspapers interpreted it as “enemies” turning “friends”. In the NRC (*Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*; “New Rotterdam daily paper”), the newly formed government was entitled “a showdown in Paramaribo”:

In order to rule, [Bouterse] turned to his avowed enemy of the Internal War (1986-1992), former Jungle commando leader Ronnie Brunswijk ... He also approached Paul Somohardjo ... who had been imprisoned in Fort Zeelandia [where the December murders took place] in the 1980s under Bouterse. (Jurna 2010: 4)

Primarily concerned with how the election of Bouterse would affect Suriname's relationship with the Netherlands, the NRC editor in chief Birgit Donker spoke in the newspaper of 4 June 2010 of “an extraordinarily unsatisfactory situation, but one which is the result of a democratic process”:

The Netherlands finds itself confronted with an uneasy reality ... Because of the drug trade, both Bouterse and Brunswijk are in the Netherlands sentenced by default to eleven and six years of imprisonment respectively ... In Suriname pragmatism has amply beaten principles ... It is particularly sad for [the 350.000 Surinamese people residing in the Netherlands] that the choice of Bouterse as President will again [as in the 1980s] lead the Dutch-Surinamese relationship to descend to subzero temperatures. Obviously it is out of the question that this wanted criminal will be received as head of state by the Netherlands. (Donker 2010: 7)

The political cooperation between Bouterse and Brunswijk in drafting the 2010-2015 government agreement was understood differently by doglas in Nickerie, especially when approached in the Surinamese context of nation-building. A political Bouterse-Brunswijk alliance was not incomprehensible in their shared nationalist drive against Dutch support for *apanjaht* politics of ethnic favouritism undermining ‘real independence’. If an *apanjaht* form of independence was one of subjugation to Dutch economic, political and ideological control, the goal of ‘real independence’ shared by Bouterse and Brunswijk – whether in their turbulent 1980s or in their first

‘legitimate’ government – envisaged Suriname as a state that can control its own resources, its own politics, and its own people.

Reconsidering the Ethnic Taboo and the Bouterse Taboo:

Concluding Remarks

In an “homage” to Fredrik Barth’s 1969 work on *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Katherine Verdery reflected on Barth’s suggestion of ethnicity as “situational identity” of ascription and self-ascription “produced under particular interactional, historical, economic and political circumstances” (Barth 1994: 12). While following Barth’s emphasis on boundary formations to understand ethnicity, Verdery asserted that “situationalism”, or the “manipulation of identities and choice among them” (Verderey 1994: 35-6), has not been a light task in ex-Yugoslavia:

Persons of mixed origin – those who once declared themselves ‘Yugoslavs’ – are being forced to elect a single identity [Serb, Croat, Bosnian, Macedonian, etcetera]. ‘Ethnic cleansing’ does not mean only that people of the ‘other’ group are being exterminated: it also means the extermination of alternative identity choices. The prospects for studying ‘situationalism’ in ex-Yugoslavia (not to mention the prospects for many of its inhabitants) look grim. (ibid. 38)

Although of course Suriname has not witnessed mass ethnic violence as ex-Yugoslavians did, its *apanjaht* politics did not provide much space for ethnic “situationalism” either. In 2010, the NDP’s nationalist turn provided a political platform or “situation” in which ethnic identities could be allowed more flexibility. For all the ethnic boundary making in Surinamese politics, Bouterse’s rhetoric and people’s voting behaviour in 2010 were evidence of simultaneous processes of ethnic boundary *un*making in Suriname. As this chapter has shown, Surinamese politics since independence has not only been about ethnicity, about *apanjaht*. It has been a postcolonial journey in which people have been trying to deal with being part of a Surinamese nation rather than “a puppet of colonial economics” – and, by implication, how to govern this new nation.

In their campaigns in the run up to the 2010 elections, politicians in inter-ethnic alliances had a tendency to mobilize voters on ethnic terms, despite the ‘taboo’ of ethnic clientelism. Dogla voting behaviour in Nickerie and the election of Bouterse, however, shows that people were not docile followers of the colonially created ethnic party system. They were questioning whether the political tradition of *apanjaht* and ethnic clientelism had been helping the Surinamese population to move forward as an independent nation. People considered alternatives to again electing an *apanjaht* government. The most powerful alternative in these elections was Desi Bouterse. Bouterse’s supporters effectively challenged the lack of nationalism in the *apanjaht* structure. The reason why Suriname had still not ‘matured’ into an independent nation, according to Bouterse, was both the structure of ethnic clientelism and the incessant political and economic dependency on development funds from the Netherlands, which in his view had long hampered Suriname’s progress.

Another reason for a vote against Suriname’s *apanjaht* politics had been the popular complaint that “nothing ever changes in this country” – or, in other words, that the previous Front governments had not been responsive enough to their population’s demands, that they had not done enough. As much as Bouterse’s politics have been criticized, the establishment of industrial companies such as Staatsolie and the Patamacca Oliepalmbedrijf (Surinamese-owned oil companies) during the military period strengthened people’s *Wi Egi Sani*, or the belief that Suriname had the potential to have their own, ‘independent’ things. Furthermore, during the Wijdenbosch (NDP) government in 1996, two bridges were built, one of which shortened the journey between Paramaribo and Nickerie from a week over water (van Heckers 1923) to around four hours by road.

In this chapter I have argued that postcolonial politics in Suriname has not only been about *apanjaht*, or ethnic essentialism. It has also been a rejection of it. Since the country’s official independence in 1975, Surinamese politics has presented stark disagreements with regards to the role of ethnicity in the definition of what it means to be Surinamese. The 2010 elections were an exemplary event in which colonially established categorizations of ethnicity in state politics – and associated ethnic

clientelism – were questioned and renegotiated by doglas in Nickerie. By pointing out that they did not ‘fit’ a system of ethnic politics, doglas in Nickerie did not simply invoke a notion of hybridity in order to counter ethnic essentialism, but rejected ethnicity – and therefore hybridity – in their redefinition of Surinameseness.

Chapter Three

Names and Spaces: Identity-Mapping of Everyday Dwelling in Nickerie

Whether it be poring over maps, taking the train for a weekend back home, picking up on the latest intellectual currents, or maybe walking the hills... we engage our implicit conceptualisations of space in countless ways. They are a crucial element in our ordering of the world, positioning ourselves, and others human and non-human, in relation to ourselves.

Doreen Massey (2005: 105)

Figure 12: Westkanaalstraat, Centre of Nieuw Nickerie



Photo by the author

In Nickerie many Hindustani families live in the polders. Places such as the Corantijnpolder and the Clarapolder and Hampton Court, we call them Hindustani polders because of the rice paddies but also because of Hindustani religion. But people in Hindustani polders are not less Nickerian than people living in Nieuw Nickerie or Wageningen, where religions and lifestyles are more mixed. People in the towns are not more Nickerian than Creoles living in Margarethenburg or Javanese in Nationaal Project. Being Nickerian is not about whether we behave ethnically or mixed but about living in Nickerie. Nickerie means being at home, where we belong. With all its swamps and mosquitoes, this place is what we share. That is why we call ourselves Nickerians.

Paulo, taxi driver in Nickerie

In Chapter One, I spoke about Suriname's political ideology Unity in Diversity, defining Surinamese-ness as a celebration of ethnic diversity. In Chapter Two, I questioned this ideology in the context of dogla voting behaviour. In this chapter, I will show the limitations of this ideology in accounting for experiences of communal belonging beyond the national and the ethnic. Most people in Nickerie carried a passport naming their country, and most listed themselves or were listed as members of specific ethnic groups; but people also connected to various other group identifications. Another approach to questions of unity and difference in Suriname was foregrounded in dogla references to place. As this chapter will show, in spatial identifications with Nickerie, a national-ethnic categorization defining Suriname's population loses much of its relevance.

If we conceive of Suriname as a model of national unity in ethnic diversity, it is not clear how we are to position the district of Nickerie and the people inhabiting it. In the context of ethnic boundary-making and unmaking in Suriname's nation-building process, I ask how people in Nickerie position themselves geographically, with attention to the ways they draw and redraw the boundaries of their dwelling-places, and identities. In stressing Nickerie as a place, as a locality, I will argue that the everyday experience of being in Nickerie acts as a primary marker of people's self-identifications, confronting Surinamese-ness and bridging ethnic diversity.

In Nickerie, perceptions of what constitutes home and communal belonging were closely related to a rural environment of rice and mosquitoes, but also of pesticides

and suicides. It was in their ‘dwelling’ in this environment, so to speak, that people identified with a Nickerian-ness that was explicitly distinguished from Surinamese-ness. Furthermore, through cross-ethnic interactions in the hospital, through sharing each other’s food at *verjari*’s (birthday parties), and through other ‘leisure visits’ to each other’s houses, Nickerians built a shared communal Nickerian identity that bridged ethnicity. Being Nickerian was to belong to a community whose boundaries were drawn on the basis of place rather than culture or nationality.

In this chapter, I will first show how people in Nickerie portrayed themselves as Nickerians rather than as Surinamese. Through the very name “Nickerian” they were assigning themselves a bounded, regional identity. The remainder of the chapter is concerned with mapping Nickerie, both geographically through cartographic state projects and socially through local exercises of what I have termed – following one of my dogla friends in Nickerie – ‘identity-mapping’. The process of identity-mapping, or the mapping of people’s everyday dwelling in Nickerie, demonstrates that our multi-dimensional and context-dependent identities are not only linked to acts of naming, but also to place.

Us Nickerians

In the early mornings, the district’s main bus station in the town of Nieuw Nickerie was bustling with people trying to catch one of several mini-buses heading eastward via the districts of Coronie and Saramacca to Paramaribo. I found myself sandwiched in an ethnically mixed group of people, my lap and arms involuntarily complicated in cuddling a big lady and her even bigger basket of noisy chickens. A group of young boys in school uniform asked me if I “also go to Suriname today”. Taken by surprise, I responded that I was going to Paramaribo.

On subsequent occasions I frequently heard people in Nickerie referring to the capital as “Suriname”. When Nickerians talked about Paramaribo, also called *de stad* (“the city”), they literally talked about a very different place from where they lived; when they were going for a trip to Paramaribo they said “we are going to Suriname”,

contrasting themselves as “Nickerians” (which however did not imply that they did not also consider themselves to be Surinamese citizens holding a Surinamese passport).

Nickerians were not only locating themselves in a geographical context different from Paramaribo. “Being Nickerian” was also ‘language’ – both in terms of bodily communication and in terms of how people spoke verbally through their pronunciation and their choice of words. My dogla friend Ella told me that “when we go to the city people always know that we are Nickerians because of our language, no matter what language [Dutch, Sranantongo, Sarnami, Javanese, etc.] we speak, the people in the city can hear it.” She explained that Nickerians speak more slowly than people in other districts and use a lot more Anglophone terms. Furthermore, Nickerians were also recognized in their body language, through the way they moved, their hand gestures and facial expressions.

In this regard the place Nickerie would seem to have endowed the people living in it with, in Marcel Mauss’ (1979) terms, a set of shared knowledge of “body techniques”. Mauss gives examples of techniques of the body, including everyday tasks such as walking, swimming and sleeping, and explains that different societies perform these techniques in a variety of ways. They are learned through an individual’s education as well as through unspoken habits that are typical of that society – such as a particular method of walking. Furthermore, people’s surroundings, the places where they grow and learn, affect their body techniques.

Perhaps some of the embodied and linguistic differences of Nickerian-ness and Surinamese-ness find their roots colonially. During the centuries of colonial domination, Nickerie’s closest neighbours lived less than fourteen kilometres away across the Corantijn River in an area called Berbice. From the seventeenth century, Berbice changed hands frequently from Dutch to British colonial governors, until in 1831 it was joined to Essequibo and Demerara in British Guiana. Colonially separated from Berbice, Nickerie became the Dutch New Colony. The Dutch Old Colony – called Suriname – comprised the land from the Coppename River to the

Marowijne River (with the capital at Paramaribo) (see Figure 1, in Introduction). Eventually the Old and New Colony were combined into a single colony (Helman 1995 [1983]; van Heckers 1923).

People in Nickerie told me that their identification with Berbice had long remained stronger than with Paramaribo, at least until the two “Wijdenbosch bridges” – over the Nickerie River and the Coppename River – were built in 1996, easing access to “Suriname” (see Chapter Two). By boat, the crossing of the Corantijn River between Nickerie and Guyana can take less than a couple of hours – depending on the sea currents, and on the type of boat. Before the bridges and a paved road was built, the overseas journey between Nickerie and Paramaribo used to take a week (van Heckers 1923).

My Hindustani neighbours in Nickerie also pointed out their relative ‘distance to Suriname’ with reference to practices of Hinduism. They said that Nickerian Hinduism is more similar to Guyanese Hinduism than to the Hinduism practiced in Paramaribo. According to Freek Bakker (1999), similarities and differences in practices of Hinduism can for instance be seen in the colours of the *jhandis* (prayer flags).

Accounts of Suriname as a model of national unity in ethnic diversity obscure geographical scales of belonging that surface when paying attention to how Nickerians, as “Us Nickerians”, relate themselves to the Surinamese capital of Paramaribo. Regional identifications gain further prominence when we consider how Nickerians referred to their Guyanese neighbours. Among both Guyanese and Surinamese Nickerians, a common consensus appeared to be that the Guyanese were different from the Surinamese to a certain extent, but that because there were so many of them in Nickerie who had been there for so many years, that they were Nickerians despite not holding a Surinamese passport. Their identity was Guyanese but also Nickerian.

On other levels, however, Surinamese Nickerians *did* identify with Suriname. They expressed a collective behaviour of Surinamese-ness against *vreemdelingen* (foreigners), such as *bakras* (Dutch/‘whites’) and also the recent waves of “new Chinese” (see Introduction). Nickerians often complained about various aspects of their society, usually involving the weather, the economy and state politics. Yet as soon as foreigners provided commentary about Suriname that could potentially be interpreted as negative, Nickerians defensively warned them: “Don’t you dare saying anything bad about my beloved Suriname!”

This attitude tended to gain even fiercer expressions towards the people locally called “Euro-Surinamers”, referring to people who chose to leave Suriname for Holland upon independence, refusing to exchange their imposed Dutch nationality for a Surinamese passport. These ‘traitors’ were seen to embrace and even assimilate the identity of the former colonizers, who had mistreated their ancestors. Whenever Euro-Surinamers visited friends and relatives in Suriname, they were frequently greeted with an indignant reminder that they had no right to have an opinion on Suriname because they chose to leave it, to leave “their own people” and, furthermore, that “they put no effort in helping Suriname progress”. The financial contributions many Euro-Surinamers have been making to Suriname’s economic welfare through remittances were often, or deliberately, neglected.

These examples expose the context-dependency inherent in naming practices, and the ways they blur some social group boundaries by emphasizing, or even temporarily fixing, others. The acts of naming given above raise questions about nationhood in particular. Is ‘passport identity’ national? Is Nickerian identity regional? Were these simply geo-political identifications? What happened to Suriname’s plurality, to the ethnic contrasts? These questions point to the multidimensional experiences of identity. Of course, someone can be Nickerian, Surinamese, dogla, school teacher, mother of five children, Christian, and more. Most of these identifications are not single units of difference but interrelated, affecting the overall understanding (and treatment) of a person.²⁷

²⁷ This interrelation between identity categories has been termed “intersectionality”; see Introduction.

This chapter is concerned with how people presented the spatial contexts in which ethnic and national identities were overcome or made irrelevant in Nickerie. With the phrase “Us Nickerians”, people did not depict themselves as a group sharing patriotic sentiments. Rather, regardless of ethnic or national labels, they shared what Rita Astuti called “unkindness”. In her ethnography of Vezo people in Madagascar, Astuti distinguished people’s “kindness” as their shared substance based on descent, and “unkindness” as an identity which “is not determined by birth, by descent, by an essence inherited from the past, but is created contextually in the present through what people do and through the place where they live” (Astuti 1995a: 4; see also Astuti 1995b).

Astuti’s emphasis on “Vezo identity [as] an activity rather than a state of being” (Astuti 1995a: 3) provides a fruitful theoretical angle from which to understand people’s spatial identifications with Nickerie. According to Astuti the term “Vezo” ties the identity of a group of people to a particular location and to what they are doing there, to where and how they are living. Likewise, the term “Nickerian” can be interpreted as reference to an identity based on where and how people in Nickerie live. “Us Nickerians” thus shifts our attention from ethnic dividing lines to a particular emphasis on place, of “where we live”, as was suggested by the taxi driver, Paulo, quoted at the start of this chapter. Douglas in Nickerie not only recognized people’s divided spaces but zoomed in also on their *shared* spaces, recognizing dwelling itself as space of communal belonging.

According to Gupta and Ferguson (1992), the concept of “community” can be perceived as a group identity related to place; and, as Baumann (1996) argues, community is not necessarily synonymous with culture. The basic assumption underlying Marcus and Fischer’s (1999) “cultural critique” was that anthropologists’ work involves an encounter with cultures different from their own. “Cultural critique”, however, risks taking ‘culture’ as a pre-given, almost primordial group identity which contrasts with other ‘cultures’ as clearly differentiated and internally homogenous wholes (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Gupta and Ferguson’s (1992)

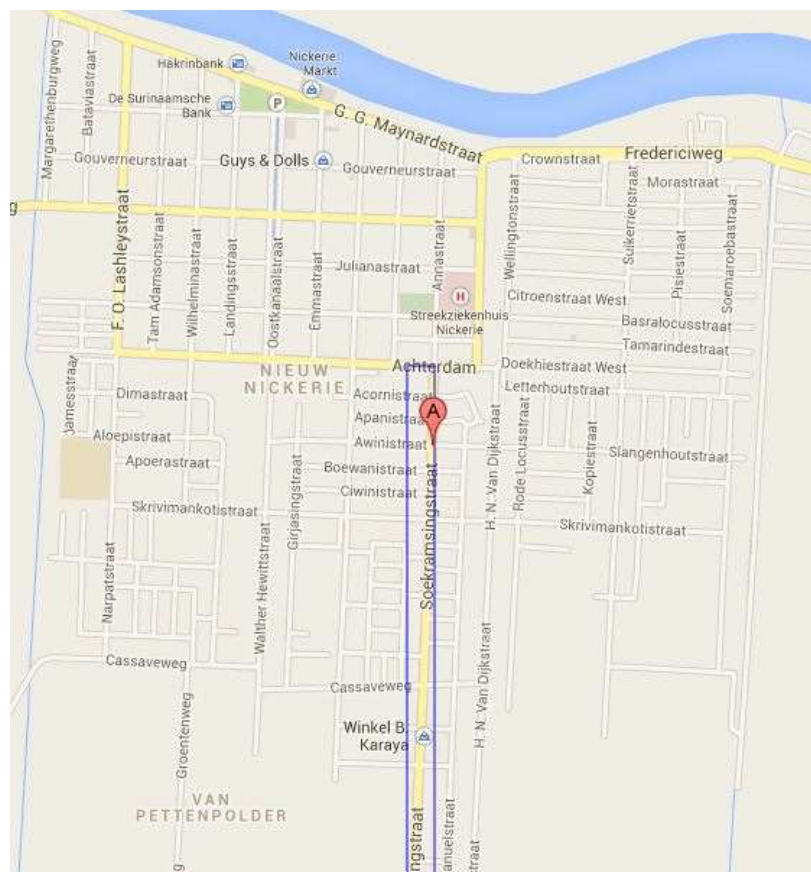
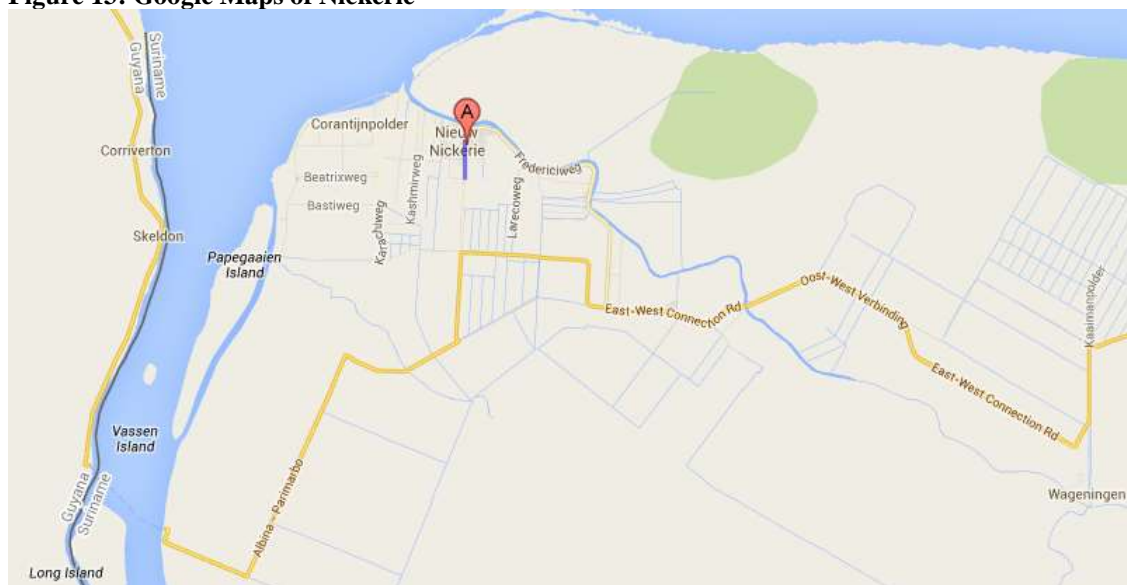
discussion questioned the assumption that different cultures neatly inhabit different spaces, thus tying, or “rooting”, a culture to a locality (Malkki 1992). This premise is problematic indeed, and postmodern and feminist scholars have rightly critiqued it by stressing borderlands and hybridity (see Anzaldúa 1987; Bhabha 1989).

Ironically, however, the importance of group identities overlapping within the location of the everyday is rarely taken seriously in *multicultural* settings such as Nickerie. Following Michael Smith’s (1965) argument of Caribbean societies as “plural”, much of the literature on ethnicity in Suriname assumes cultural *plurality*, ethnic *differences* in terms of people’s origins or homelands, and a presumed necessity (and hence associated obstacles) of integrating cultural diversity into spatial ‘unity’ (see Dew 1978; Meel 1998; Oostindie 1996). My emphasis in this chapter is rather on what a group of people living in a place have in common, the spatial experiences they share, their ‘homeland’ as the dwelling space of their everyday life. Below, I will show how doglas in Nickerie considered the relation between place and community as expressed in maps.

Nickerie on the Map

When Stuart and I started living in Nickerie’s Van Pettenpolder, in April 2009, most streets were dusty lines of sand or – depending on the season – streams of mud with plenty of bumps and holes. An exception was the Soekramsingstraat. The Soekramsingstraat started at the Achterdam, a paved road dividing Nieuw Nickerie – the district’s ‘capital’ – and the Van Pettenpolder. Continuing into the Biswamitreweg, the Soekramsingstraat was a wide road connecting Nieuw Nickerie with the East-West Connection east towards Wageningen – once Nickerie’s internationally celebrated rice capital with a rice factory that had been one of the world’s most technologically advanced, but was now derelict and overgrown with weeds (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Google Maps of Nickerie



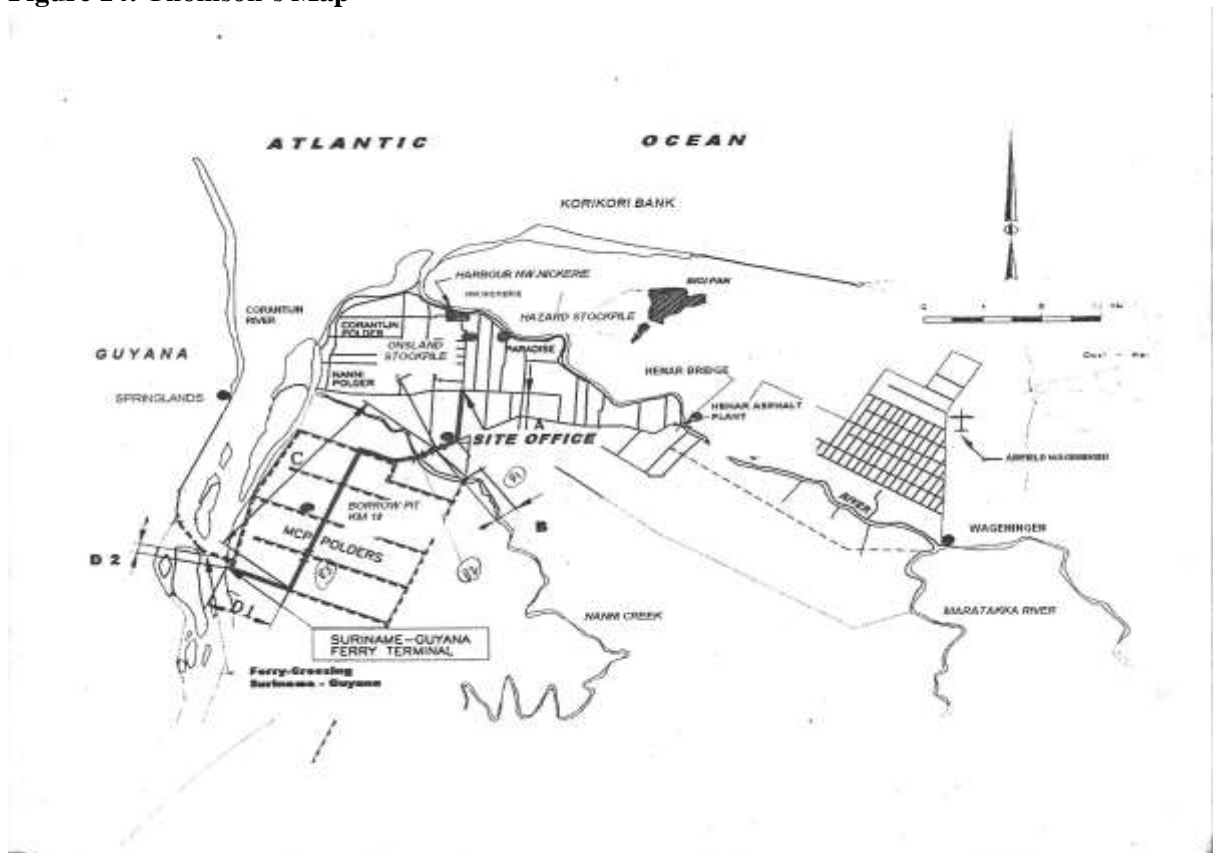
Source: Google Maps²⁸

²⁸https://www.google.co.uk/mapmaker?splash=1&ll=5.880723,57.001534&spn=0.207642,0.338173&t=m&z=12&vpsrc=6&q=kaart+nieuw+nickerie+soekramsingstraat&hl=en&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=relatedproducts_maps&utm_source=mapseditbutton_normal_countrylaunch_uk [accessed 6 December 2013]

The Soekramsingstraat was part of a newly developed but major road project connecting Nieuw Nickerie to ‘other places with roads’. The road project continued southward until a point on the western coast facing Long Island – locally called *Zuidring* or South-drain – where an official ferry to Guyana was planned to dock. A year later, in the run up to the elections of May 2010, many smaller roads had been paved. According to Thomson, the Australian foreman of the big road project, in less than a year’s time over fifty kilometers of road were being paved in Nickerie, mostly outsourced through Chinese companies.

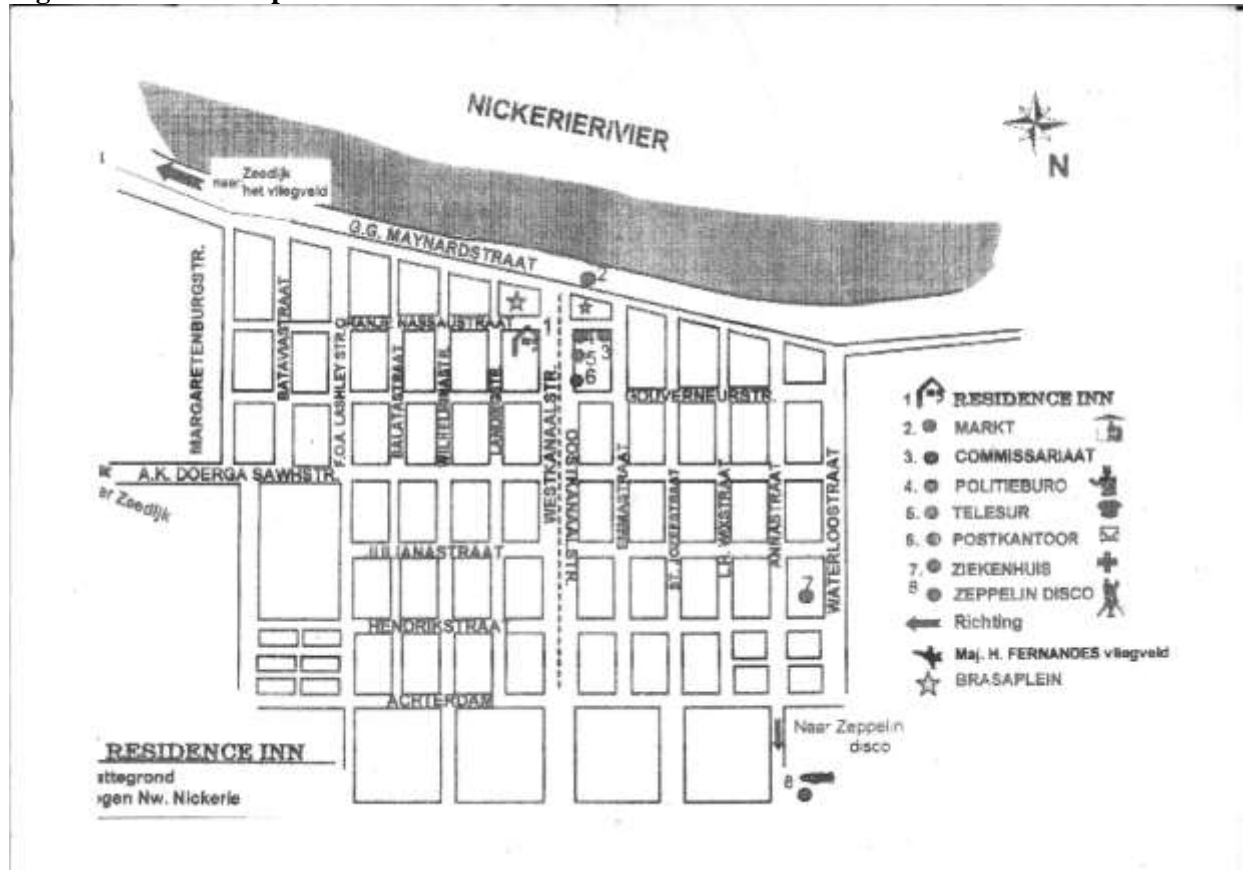
When we first arrived in Nickerie, I thought I’d get my bearings through street maps, but these were hard to find. Thomson confirmed that Nickerie did not yet have much in terms of maps. He gave me a copy of the one that he used for the state’s road project, see Figure 14. It was the second map I had seen of Nickerie in about a year’s time and it gave a trustworthy overview of Nickerie’s geographical division of spaces – or so I thought.

Figure 14: Thomson’s Map



The other map I got hold of was the street map of Nieuw Nickerie which the prestigious Residence Inn hotel supplied for its guests, see Figure 15. Again, I regarded this map, simple as it was, as a convenient means to get my bearings in the town and as reference material.

Figure 15: Street Map of Nieuw Nickerie



It was not until the GLIS project (see below) came to Nickerie, however, that I realised just how little these maps meant to the people I lived with, to my neighbours and friends in Nickerie. As I will show below, their responses to the GLIS project were in sharp disagreement with cartographic representations of the place they lived. Their objections to recognizing Nickerie in GLIS representations reflects what Charles Frake described as “resistance to public inscription”:

Maps and charts, by inscribing a place in official records ... improve the place to the official eye. They tidy it up ... [making] the place, all its parts and names ‘correct’. But the very nature of places, as known to locals in all their inconsistent, fuzzy, and trivial details, affords a built-in-line of resistance to public inscription (1996: 245).

Mapping Nickerie: the GLIS project

Towards the end of the summer of 2009, leaflets were distributed in Nickerie and media advertisements in newspapers appeared informing people about the GLIS project. The leaflet announced that “the GLIS convoy will be coming to you” (*de GLIS-karavaan komt naar u toe*), and asked if people could have their *perceelkaart* (card of their plot, land) ready. See Figures 16 and 17.

Quite a few Nickerians were nervous about this request. “What paperwork? We do not have a *perceelkaart*”, many of them commented. Building plans of plots and houses? ‘Proofs’ of entitlement to land, of ownership to their house, garden? The area in the Van Pettenpolder where we lived was known as *Klein Bangladesh* (Little Bangladesh). “When we came here”, my neighbours Sharda and Bayern said, “the land was swamps and forest. We build up everything from scratch.” They told me that they moved the vegetation away, and after the *pundit* had purified the ground they started to build their house and garden. “We did not buy the land but nobody was using it. We never had paperwork.”

The Van Pettenpolder, however, located in the square between Margaretenburgh and Waterloo, and bordering Nieuw Nickerie, was not marked red on the leaflet (Figure 16). Sharda and Bayern were temporarily relieved, although eventually the GLIS would also seek to incorporate Little Bangladesh in their mapping project.

When the leaflets were distributed, many people in Nickerie – including myself – were confused about what the GLIS project was about, apart from having something to do with land. Notwithstanding the lighthearted message on the bottom of the leaflet saying ‘GLIS, CHRYSTAL CLEAR’ (*GLIS, GLASHELDER*), my neighbours and I struggled to even trace what G.L.I.S. was supposed to mean, guessing that it would be using the Geographical Information System (GIS) in order to obtain spatial information about Suriname’s territorial surfaces, with the letter ‘L’ perhaps providing a seemingly surplus addition of the word ‘land’ to the equation.

Figure 16: Announcement of the GLIS Project

Nickerianen opgelet!!!!

Het Glis heeft ook *U* nodig.
De Gliskaravaan komt naar u toe

Van 12 t/m 25 oktober zal kaartmateriaal ingezameld worden in de wijken:

• Margarethenburg	• Hazard
• Waterloo	• Hampton Court
• Nieuw Nickerie (Centrum)	• Sawmillkreek Polder
• Van Drimmelpolder	• Boonacker Polder
• Corantijnpolder	• Wageningen

De Gliskaravaan komt bij u aan de deur en maakt een foto van uw perceelkaart. U ontvangt uw kaart meteen weer terug.

Dus, Nickerie! Leg uw perceelkaart klaar, want de Gliskaravaan komt eraan!!

GLIS, GLASHELDER

Figure 17: GLIS Project Asking for People's *Perceelkaart*

De landmeter heeft uw hulp nodig

Om een digitale kaart van Suriname te kunnen maken, heeft het GLIS de afmetingen van alle percelen in Suriname nodig. Deze afmetingen staan op elke perceelkaart, ook die van u.



Landmeter in het veld.



Soms komt de landmeter voor aanvullende informatie bij u aan huis.



Hij vraagt, na zich te hebben gelegitimeerd, of hij een kopie van uw perceelkaart mag maken.



Het zou de landmeter tijd besparen als u uw perceelkaart bij de hand had.



De landmeter maakt een kopie van uw perceelkaart.



De landmeter geeft u hierna uw perceelkaart meteen terug.

Following some inquiries we learned that Suriname's GLIS project was indeed using the GIS. Commissioned by the government's Ministry of Spatial Planning, Land and Forest Management in Paramaribo, the GLIS (*Grondregistratie en Land Informatie Systeem*: Ground registration and Land Information System) project was assigned a self-supporting Management Institute and carried out by a group of people working under the name of PMU-GLIS (Project Management Unit –GLIS). According to Rick, an advisor of PMU-GLIS, their database was to hold not only geographical information in an environmental sense, such as which areas were prone to flooding, but also demographic and other statistical data, such as land distribution and density of population. Rick was born and raised in Paramaribo and had recently returned from the Netherlands following his university studies there in geography and sustainable development. He stressed that the aim of the GLIS project was to not only provide clarity in disputes over land ownership but also to develop platforms for other social and economic issues. "Dreams of alleviating poverty and making everyone happy are all on the agenda", Rick laughed.

Rick said that with rules and laws changing regarding the granting of lots and the distribution of territory among private owners – most notably in terms of having to make these more transparent – questions about the GLIS project had already been sensitive matters within Surinamese politics for years. I had been aware that issues over land ownership were a thorny business particularly among politicians, with ethnic parties distributing land to 'friends'. During my time in Suriname, the then Javanese staffed ministry dealing with land issues conveniently operated with a lack of any established, traceable legal pathways for allocating land. As the Belgian sociologist and long-term Surinamese resident Marc Willems told me during an interview in Paramaribo, Hindustani and Creole politicians posed no serious threat against this practice because they had done exactly the same when they had been in positions of power in the ministry controlling land issues.

How ethnic clientelism related to GLIS, however, was not obvious. Apart from discomfort over what was expected of them in terms of paperwork, Nickerians

questioned the picture on the leaflet: grids, lines, blocks. Figures 13, 14, 15 and 16 all show the linear, grid-like pattern of Nickerie's streets and the compartmentalisation of Nickerie's polders in rectangular blocks. "Is this Nickerie..." they said, "Where are the houses? Where are we? " Their explanations of space were not linear grids dominated by street names. Their references to place and the characteristics of places did not quite match what cartographers would consider relevant, but made sense to them in their daily lives. They conceptualized their spaces not in the cartographic terms of the GLIS project, but in processes of what I have termed 'identity-mapping', to which I now turn.

Nickerians On The Map:

Representing Space Through Identity-Mapping

It took me a little while before I realized that bus driver Justin was actually a really nice, wise, clever old man that I could befriend. Although quite a few people had advised me that Justin was dogla and that I should get to know him, his seemingly non-stop *pssss pssss, hey schatje* ("hey sweetie") flirting whistle had initially put me off. Eventually, when I ran into him while he was busy helping to pick up the oranges that had fallen from a friend's market stall, I was able to start talking to him before he had a chance to start whistling. From that moment he became an interesting friend, always open to conversation (when he was not away with his bus), always critical, but thoughtful. And with that flirty whistling he was simply behaving like most Surinamese men did towards female bodies passing by.

One day when I joined him at the bus stop while he was waiting for his bus to fill up, Justin said something to me which made me question a point made by Clifford Geertz: "Something that is a dimension of everyone's existence, the intensity of where we are, passes by anonymous and unremarked. It goes without saying ... Whoever discovered water, it was not a fish" (1996: 259). Unlike Geertz's metaphorical fish and its "anonymous and unremarked" existence in the water, however, Justin did not talk in terms of "discovery", but rather of fish and water in mutual interaction:

You know how Paramaribo is now undertaking the GLIS project? I think it is a good project, especially for tourism, and tourism means more income for Suriname. With GLIS maps tourists can figure out where places are. But to be honest, to me, and for all of us here I think, GLIS mapping does not mean much. The land-maps (*landkaarten*) do not say anything about Nickerie, really, about where we live. Nickerie is not lines and dots on a piece of paper. Do you know what Nickerie is? It is about the maps we make ourselves to define Nickerie and our life. Our maps are not about grids, although for some people they might be, but they are not about geographical scaling as such. They can be about here, there and everywhere mixed throughout time and locations, they are life-maps (*levenskaarten*), they are our identity cartography (*identiteits-cartografie*).

I was interested in Justin's self-coined concept of "identity-cartography", or identity-mapping. When I asked if these were like mind-maps in the sense that the places were defined by people's thoughts and memories, he thought for a while.

Yes and no. Of course, I can map in my mind where we are sitting right now and add that to memories of other times I have been sitting here. I can also add it to that particular mosquito infested morning at the bus stop when you first asked me if I wanted to speak to you about identity. I can map all that into my mind, but it is not just that. When you place your foot on the ground, how hot does it feel?

"Uh, it is actually not hot", I replied, having plunged my foot into a muddy puddle below the bench where I had had my feet lifted up. "It's a little lukewarm perhaps, I'd say it feels wet, and there is mud between my toes, but no, not really hot".

Baja, exactly! Identity-maps are not just about my mind, but also about the environment, about your foot in the muddy puddle. That's all part of the map. And some parts of my map can be monotonous when they are not eventful, like the journey I drive between here and Paramaribo many days. But at the same time my identity-map is always changing, because everything depends on the weather, the mosquitoes, the roads, the accidents, the gossip... so the journey can sometimes be very different. And of course it depends on whether I can see my grandchildren and how my friends are doing. All of that maps our identity; it maps who we are and where we belong. Now that is something a GLIS map can never show. You ask other people in Nickerie about identity-maps, I'm sure they will agree.

Intrigued with Justin's concept of identity-mapping, I did start to ask other people how they would map Nickerie and their life. In order to do so, I decided to try some

aspects of mapping research methods more commonly used in participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and in participatory action research (PAR), in which informal maps are prepared by researchers in collaboration with the people whose local situation they seek to improve (Chambers 1994). Of course, my experiments with these mapping techniques was not with the pretence that they would 'improve' people's situation – and this was not what people expected from it. Instead, I hoped that it would give me an opportunity to represent Justin's concept of identity-mapping visually.

In the context of PRA, mapping is used to learn from collective local knowledge, while the shared analysis also may facilitate communication and interactions. Maps can be constructed by using various techniques, such as participants mapping social relations in concentric circle diagrams, or ranking their priorities or specific events, people and things in a matrix, by drawing causal diagrams of how they relate events to each other, to do transect walks, or to make seasonal calendars (Chambers 1994). In the context of my fieldwork in Nickerie, I tried some of these visual representations of 'lived space' with people in the hope to get a grasp of how they identified themselves with reference to their daily dwelling in Nickerie.

Of course, people's lives are too complex to be confined to dots, lines, circles, squares and other drawings on a piece of paper. And on a methodological note I may need to clarify that the mapping exercise I tried with people in Nickerie did not develop into a major project of map-making in the sense of collecting a large number of physical pieces of paper with people's pen strokes on it. Although some people said that the diagrams and circles were an illuminating and exciting way to explain things about themselves, I particularly encouraged people to just draw something they liked to draw themselves rather than adding to pre-given grids. Furthermore, what I was really interested in was not the physical maps of people, but rather how people talked about these in the process of drawing, in their explanations of it and the meanings they attributed to it.

The geographer John Brian Harley, well-known for his work on European cartographic maps as “a form of power knowledge”, proposed that we consider maps themselves as “a kind of language” (1994: 278). In this regard, the GLIS and other cartographic maps of Nickerie can be conceived of as speaking a language that differs from the ones spoken by people’s identity-maps. Whereas printed maps “reify an ordering of the space represented on the map by making it visible” (ibid. 292), the ways in which Nickerians talked about their spaces allowed a social orientation based on shifting map-ifications. Rather than going by references to colonial or GLIS maps, the people in Nickerie produced their own, flexible mind-maps in interaction with the weather, with insects, with the use and effects of pesticides, and also with the locations and people they visited, worked with, socialized with on a daily basis, and through that they had a certain control over their living spaces. Their “maps” were not fixed in time and location but were not less powerful or more metaphorical than Harley’s cartographic maps, because they were a reference frame by which to organize daily life.

Not only the identity-maps of people in Nickerie were flexible and open to change. Despite the factuality suggested by maps produced through GIS methods, it could be argued that all maps are temporary because social and physical environments change over time. In other words, even cartographic maps are not as fixed in time and space as they appear to be. Furthermore, as Harley noted, “maps are never value-free images” but tell us as much about the cartographer, or about the “map-producing society” as about the space that is represented (ibid. 278, 298). Despite their presumed inclusiveness, maps “exert a social influence through their omissions as much as by the features they depict and emphasise” (ibid. 290). Whether voluntarily or involuntarily, people cannot walk in and out of just any space at any time. This variable occupancy of spaces is a key example of the context-dependency of people’s identity, whether in terms of ethnicity, of “Us Nickerians”, or on other scales. In this regard the map-drawing of people in Nickerie was about boundary drawing, just like cartographic boundary-drawings. As their identity-maps show however, these boundaries were not necessarily – or not only – ethnic boundaries.

The exercise of identity-mapping showed that people experienced the spatiality of Nickerie not as a cartographic street map, but as a place with which they interacted and which formed part of their daily identity. Furthermore, their descriptions implied a movement through their spaces, an activity rather than a fixed representation. Nickerians were embodying their space because they related to it in terms of being part of it, in it, rather than describing or drawing it in abstract, externalizing terms. The identity-maps were not a two-dimensional piece of paper people looked at from a birds-eye-view (Golledge and Stimson 1997) but something they were 'in'. In other words, these maps showed people's existential relation to the world. In their maps people referred to their dwelling, their daily interaction with place. Below, I will show how dogla identity-mapping foregrounded their identifications with Nickerie over ethnic and national identities through shared references to rice and mosquitoes, and to pesticides and suicides; through pan-ethnic encounters in the Nickerie hospital; and through sharing each other's food during cultural celebrations, birthday parties, and visiting friends.

Identity-Mapping of Nickerie

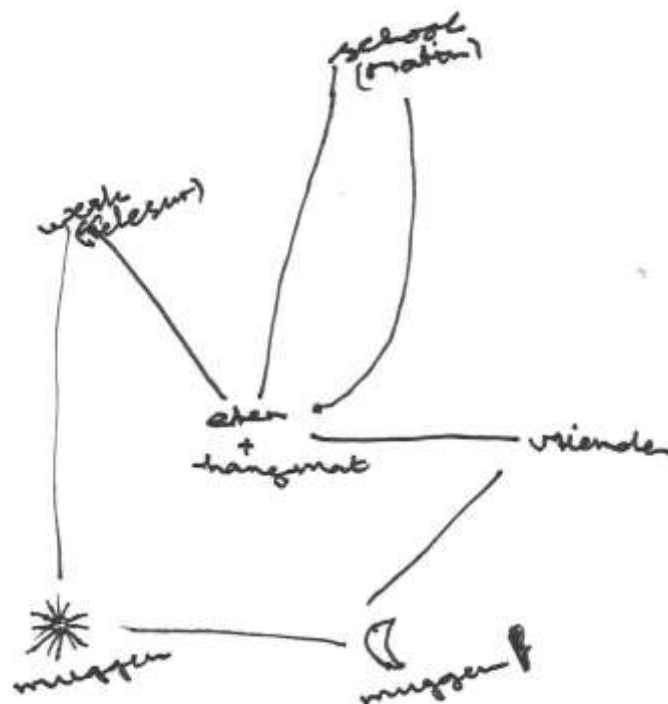
A Place of Mosquitoes and Rice...

Mosquitoes were a prevalent theme on the "identity-maps" people in Nickerie drew me. Of course, there were mosquitoes outside Nickerie, in Paramaribo, in other districts: they are common insects the world over; mosquitoes do not hold passports; they can cross any human-made geo-political boundaries. Nevertheless, Nickerian mosquitoes were particularly infamous. "Our mosquitoes are really the worst in the world", my dogla friend Stanley told me. He was talking to me from one of the desks at the telephone company Uniq, where he worked: "It can be annoying, of course, but it is also an important part of our daily life, of who we are. They bite all of us, no matter whether you are Javanese or Chinese or whatever. They bite us because we live here. Here, if I draw you my map I will make sure that there are lots and lots of mosquitoes on it."

On many identity-maps people made reference to the clouds of biting mosquitoes during dawn and dusk. Consider for instance Rowell's map (see Figure 18).

Rowell, a lively, talkative twenty year old, lived with his parents and four younger siblings in a house close to the swampy streams where his father went to catch the fish and crabs he sold on the road between Nieuw Nickerie and Paradijs (see Figure 14). Rowell said he would draw me his "everyday day" (*alledaagse dag*).

Figure 18: Rowell's Map



The first thing that greets him when he wakes up, he said, is a cloud of hungry mosquitoes (*muggen*). He then goes to work (*werk*) at the telephone company Telesur, then returns home to eat and rest in a hammock (*eten + hangmat*), then goes out again to Natin where he studies (*school*), then again returns home for food and a rest, then goes out to meet friends (*vrienden*), and when he returns home in the evening there are hungry mosquitoes again. Rowell explained:

So, as you can see on my map, this is my everyday day. Of course, the number of mosquitoes depends on the time of year. Some times are worse than others, but they are always there. They are attracted by the swamps where we live off the fish. My father has been fined again because he was trying to sell *kwie kwie* during the forbidden season.²⁹ Have you tried *kwie kwie*? Very high fines, but they sell better than the crabs. We always joke about it, about the *kwie kwie* and the fines. We never joke about the mosquitoes, they are really awful. Everybody here suffers from mosquitoes, they are typically Nickerian. Yes, so that is my everyday day.

What was interesting about people's reference to mosquitoes was that they were perceived as something "typically Nickerian". Mosquitoes were a shared phenomenon through which people identified as Nickerian. Dan Tjon Tjauw Liem (see Chapter Two) said that "in comparison to other places in Suriname, Nickerian mosquitoes are particularly awful, painful, irritating, driving us completely mad". Indeed, I recall many early evenings of trying to play tennis ending in a jumpy dance across the court hitting each other's sweaty backs, bums and legs rather than the ball with our rackets, unsuccessfully trying to get rid of these hungry creatures feasting on our flesh. According to Douglas, as expressed by Rowell and Stanley and others, mosquitoes were a phenomenon affecting everyone's daily lives, which made thinking in terms of ethnic categories irrelevant.

Another frequently drawn aspect on people's identity-maps was reference to rice. Since the colonial era, Nickerie's flat landscape has been divided into areas called *polders* – reflecting the Dutch method of reclaiming land by building dykes – proving fertile grounds to suit their "plantocracy" (van Heckers 1923). Although the sugar and coffee cultivations had gone, the polders were still in agricultural use with bananas and, predominantly, rice cultivation. With its landscape dominated by rice fields and home to the internationally known rice research centre ADRON (*Anne van Dijk Rijst Onderzoekscentrum Nickerie*), Nickerie is known as Suriname's rice district, just as people call the neighbouring district of Coronie Suriname's coconut district.

²⁹ *Kwie kwie* is a local type of fish, considered a delicacy in and beyond Nickerie.

Rice surfaced on most people's identity-maps as a marker differentiating them from people in Paramaribo. According to my Creole friends Ronald and Truus Julen:

We are Nickerian because we have the rice, no? Nickerie is the rice district, and in the city [Paramaribo] are the politicians. The rice is what binds us together as Nickerians. We share the land, we grow the rice, we eat the rice. That is our common history as Nickerians.

Most of the rice produced in Nickerie was for Surinamese consumption or export to neighbouring Caribbean countries as part of the region's economic agreement, Caricom. Export to Europe and the USA has been difficult, not only because these countries get much of their rice supply from Asia, but also because of the high use of pesticides in Nickerie's agriculture. According to Stanley, a few years back the Netherlands refused the import of bananas from Nickerie because the toxicity levels were judged to be far above European health recommendations.

A Place of Pesticides and Suicides...

Either direct or indirect references to pesticide use in Nickerie were prevalent on people's identity-mapping. Agricultural pesticide use has been a widespread and simultaneously alarming feature of Nickerian life. It both feeds and kills. To protect their crops from Nickerie's bugs and birds, the rice farmers cover their fields with nasty smelling substances. Big farmers argued that they were using the right methods to feed the Surinamese population. However, there were many other, usually less wealthy Nickerians, who grew vegetables on smaller plots of land dotted in between the rice fields. My neighbour Reshma frequently complained about "the poisoning of my plants". She had a vegetable plot behind the house of her daughter's in-laws. She worked hard. When she was not digging in her plot she drove on her scooter around the polders to sell her vegetables. Much of her family's income depended on the vegetables, but, as she said "I don't like to sell poisoned plants, what if people die eating them?"

There were many people in Nickerie whose lives were negatively affected by pesticides. Our friend Soerinder's project at his Work and Trainings Centre was an

initiative sponsored by the WIN (Welfare Institute Nickerie) group, a locally based NGO (non-governmental organization) tied in with and largely funded by Dutch NGOs. It was targeted at children with physical or mental impairments and children that had been in serious criminal activities. There was no governmental system in place to help them. Soerinder's project aimed to give these children a "recognized purpose" in society by helping them to earn money making bricks, growing vegetables and raising chickens. Stuart joined the project in its early stages, primarily assisting Soerinder in teaching the children how to use carpentry tools and materials for making timber furniture, and teaching Soerinder in designing the furniture. The bricks and the timber furniture were sold both within and beyond Nickerie's borders, showing the children that they were able to function in the regular economy just like any other citizen. Unfortunately, Soerinder had to stop raising the chickens because many were stolen before being sold. Furthermore, he told me that his vegetables perished and many of his small, weaker chicks got sick due to the extensive use of chemicals used by neighbouring rice farmers seeking to protect their own crops. Through the ground water, the chemicals seeped into Soerinder's soil, affecting vegetables (and chicks) much more vulnerable to these chemicals than rice.

Pesticide usage in Nickerie was also responsible for killing fish and birds in the rice fields. The beautiful red ibis, for example, locally called the district's *visitekaartje* ('business card') for tourists, was said to be affected by the pesticides.

Furthermore, in its fight against Nickerie's infamous mosquito plagues, the district's commissariat was sending planes over the polders spraying the agricultural fields with heavy toxins, thereby killing not only mosquitoes but also much of people's vegetable crops. It was an awful stinking substance, not only entering our nostrils but also affecting our breathing and headache levels. The smell lasted for days after the planes had gone. "Now you have become Nickerian, Iris", my neighbours said to me one day. "Now you have not only experienced the mosquitoes, but also the anti-mosquito-spraying planes".

The overwhelming pesticide use in Nickerie's polders was a particularly recurrent theme on people's identity-mapping. But it was not limited to agricultural fields. A no less alarming feature of Nickerie's daily life frequently noted was the use of pesticides and herbicides by people attempting to commit suicide. Of course, the widespread availability of harmful chemical substances in Nickerie was not the underlying cause of the high number of suicide attempts. However, people in Nickerie often made this link in their identity-maps, saying that it was 'easier' to kill oneself by drinking these substances than by other means, such as hanging. With people drinking chemicals – most notably the widely available and extremely toxic pesticide called *Gramoxone* – the Regional Hospital Nickerie (*Streekziekenhuis Nickerie*, SZN) and morgue saw many suicide cases.³⁰

My dogla friend Ivy often told me furiously about the 'overdoing' of pesticide usage in Nickerie. Ivy and her twin brother Marten lectured on chemistry and biology courses at Nickerie's Natin college. In the angry public talks about pesticides she held in the centre of Nieuw Nickerie, Ivy usually pointed her finger at the farmers. I did not realize how little I had understood her anger with pesticides until I asked her if she would like to draw me a map of her life in Nickerie. Ivy started her identity map with a letter "Z" and then stopped for a bit, while looking at the piece of paper (see Figure 19).

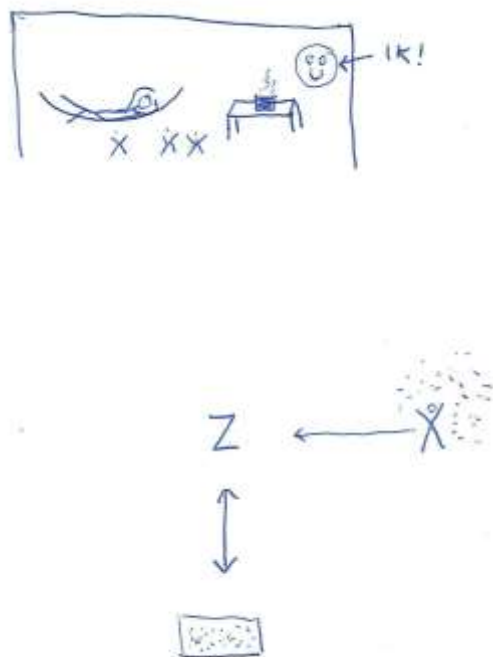
"This is the *Streekziekenhuis* [SZN, Nickerie's regional hospital]", she said ("Z" for *ziekenhuis*, "hospital"). "Do you remember me telling you about my *mati* [friend] at Sita's supermarket, that he only barely survived malaria a few months ago? He went back to work last week, but now he is back in the hospital, diagnosed with dengue this time!" She drew her friend, surrounded by dots signifying mosquitoes, and an

³⁰ Gramoxone and other harmful chemical substances have also been reported to be used in a 'curative' way by people in Suriname's forested hinterland suffering from a disease locally known as *Bussi Yassi* (biomedical term: *cutaneous leishmaniasis*), spread by sand flies and causing severe skin ulcerations and blistering. Consider an informant in Sahienschadebie Ramdas' (2012) research on this practice: "... Gramoxone kills everything. My sore was caused by *Bussi Yassi*; *bussi* means the bush, something of nature. ... if [the sore] was caused by something of nature, something that kills everything in nature would probably also kill my sore" (Pista, quoted by Ramdas 2012:19).

Unlike suicidal Nickerians then, who may resort to drinking Gramoxone to kill their entire body, Pisto and other *Bussi Yassi* affected people in the hinterland applied Gramoxone topically on their skin with the intention to cure their bodies by killing the 'nature' believed to cause the skin disease.

arrow going from him towards her “Z” (see her first drawing in Figure 19, at the bottom half of the paper; she later drew the second part of her map, at the top half, to show me that she also had a ‘happy map’, saying that she had drawn me her love for her family, for cooking, and her hammock).

Figure 19: Ivy’s Map(s)



“There are so many cases of attempted suicide”, Ivy continued. The dotted rectangle below the “Z” is the rice paddy of her mother’s family, and the doubled arrow she drew between the rice field and the hospital represents the frequent hospitalization of her mother’s younger sister Deepika because of attempted suicides. Ivy said:

Deepika keeps trying to kill herself by drinking chemical substances. There are so many cases of attempted suicide here. It is typically Nickerian. When foreigners talk about us, about Nickerie, they usually say “oh, it is that place with all the suicides”. They identify Nickerians with suicides. They are right, because we are top of the world in suicides. Almost all *bakra stagiaries* [Dutch students] that come here write their thesis on Nickerie suicide. In Paramaribo they research other things, like old age or diabetes, but here they study suicide. Suicide is awful. It affects social relations in Nickerie. It hurts everyday.

My Hindustani friend Lucy Coats-Lewis, who was doing her PhD research on suicide among the Hindustani in Nickerie at the Anton de Kom University of Paramaribo, informed me that Nickerie had been rated in the top three places in the world for concentration of suicide cases. The Dutch psychologist Dr Tobi Graafsma, project leader of the Suicide Prevention Programme in Nickerie, confirmed the social and statistical significance of suicide rates in Nickerie was extreme compared to the suicide figures noted elsewhere in the world (see also Graafsma et al. 2006).

Hosting so many cases of attempted and achieved suicide, and equally disturbing numbers of people with mosquito related diseases such as malaria and dengue, Nickerie's hospital was a place which featured frequently on people's identity-mapping. What was interesting about the hospital was that people conceived of it as a shared space in which ethnic differentiation could be bridged. Below, I will discuss how people's identity-mappings not only revealed Nickerie as their shared place of mosquitoes and rice and, alarmingly, a place of pesticides and suicides, but also how they managed to bridge ethnic differences by actively blurring ethnic and shared spaces, both in the hospital, and through the sharing of food.

Ethnic and Shared Spaces

The Nickerie Regional Hospital

People were proud of their hospital (SZN). When he drew the hospital on his map, Ivy's brother Marten said:

Our hospital is the best in Suriname. It is a place where everyone comes together, no matter whether you are Hindostani or Creole or whatever. In the hospital what matters is life and death, health and illness, matters concerning all of us regardless of our *ras* (race). It is a place we all share.

Marten and other doglas acknowledged that people's reasons for going to the hospital were usually unpleasant. Nevertheless, what Marten said was characteristic of dogla accounts about the Nickerie hospital more generally. Tina (see Chapter Two) explained:

In the hospital you can see that we are all together. While I am waiting at the reception desk I speak to a Hindustani house wife leaving the hospital after she has recovered from her attempted suicide, and to the Creole police guard who got himself into a road accident, to the heavily pregnant Amerindian girl from Wageningen, and to the Javanese cook from Ella's take away who has a sick child. That is what I mean. We are all people, we know each other. The hospital is a place we share. It is a place which belongs to all of us, like Nickerie belongs to all of us.

As illustrated by Tina and Marten, doglas often referred to the hospital as "a place we share" regardless of ethnic background. The hospital functioned as a place where ethnicity was not ignored, but it was made irrelevant in people's social interactions as pan-ethnically "us" sharing "our place". In other words, ethnic identifications did not cease to exist, but they lost much of their relevance through the way people experienced spaces and each other in everyday life, especially in frequently shared places like the hospital.

Foregrounding the hospital as 'shared space' may seem arbitrary, random. Why not schools, or perhaps specific places on the street? On some identity-maps, schools did feature as cross-ethnically shared spaces, but more often schools were depicted as spaces where inter-ethnic disagreement found some of its most explicit expression. Furthermore, there was not a particular 'common' place in Nickerie where people hung out on a daily basis, nor any other public space where people went to interact 'inter-ethnically' with each other. People did interact in the square at the main bus stop, and, to some extent, on the market. For some people these were places in which people "practiced" a good part of their everyday life (de Certeau 1984), such as my dogla friend Justin (see above).

However, the central market was not a place of clear cross-ethnic interactions. The fruit and vegetable stalls were dominated by Hindustani vendors and the fish section was partly Hindustani and partly Javanese. Creoles rarely came to the market. The market seemed a rather self-enclosed space. Many families in Nickerie grew fruits and vegetables, caught fish or raised chickens, and for most of those living in the polders the central market was a fair distance to travel. They preferred to simply put

their daily produce on a table in front of their house to sell to neighbours and others passing by.

Like the central market, the main bus stop did not necessarily provide people in Nickerie with a sense of being part of a Nickerian community that was shared cross-ethnically because it was, as Justin described it, “a place of commute: you either come to Nickerie or you are leaving it, but you are not in it”. The main bus stop, although usually busy in the early mornings, was a place of people “going to Suriname” to get official paperwork sorted, or to meet relatives there such as sons or daughters studying at the Anton de Kom university. People arriving at the bus stop were Nickerians returning home, but also people from other places in Suriname (usually Paramaribo) or from the Netherlands (such as Euro-Surinamers and *bakras*) coming to Nickerie *om te wandelen* (‘for a holiday’) and, a few times a year, Dutch students coming to Nickerie for study.

When people in Nickerie talked about going on holidays as ‘short breaks’ away from home, and about people coming to Nickerie for a break, they used the verb *wandelen*, which basically refers to the movement of leisurely strolling through a place. During the school holidays most Nickerians did not fly to exotic destinations. Instead, their children were flying kites all day, or they were *wandelen*. *Wandelen* did not necessarily mean that they would be leaving Nickerie, but referred to doing things they did in their ‘free’ time (when they were not working), which could involve simply meeting friends but it could also be a bigger ‘stroll’ such as going on a boat trip with the family or swimming in the Corantijn River. Thus, *wandelen* was understood as ‘using free time’ which could refer both to a leisurely stroll and to a bigger trip away from the direct vicinities of the house. When Nickerians talked about foreigners coming to Nickerie *om te wandelen*, they interpreted their vacation as coming for a leisurely stroll.

Going by how people drew and explained their identity-mapping, the primary pan-ethnic place where people interacted with each other on a frequent basis was Nickerie’s hospital. It was a place people frequented not necessarily because they

were sick or pregnant or injured, but also to talk to hospitalized friends, relatives, work colleagues, or “just anyone you know, really, and that’s many people”, Tina said. She added: “through the hospital we are updated about the latest gossip of the district, the stuff you don’t quite get in the newspapers.” Such “stuff” involved information beyond people’s immediate neighbourhoods, stretching throughout the district.

The hospital was a place providing people with a sense of a shared Nickerian identity that was perceived to overarch ethnic differentiation. It was, as my friend Ella (see Chapter Four) expressed it:

a public place but also an intimate place. We all live and die. The hospital is a place where you can simply be a person in your own right rather than some kind of robot dictated by race. We are all bodies, we are all Nickerians.

The hospital, then, was a place to keep each other updated about the latest regional gossip, and also a place in which people looked at each other not in terms of religion or language or looks but in terms of bodies, in terms of being people who can all get sick, who all experience birth and death. In that sense the hospital was a space in which ethnic differences were bridged.

What risks being neglected reifications of ethnicity is the “intersectionality” (see Crenshaw 1991; Davis 2008) of ethnicity with other forms of social categorizations such as gender, class and sexuality, a point which has been observed particularly among critical race and feminist scholars. In his ethnographic account of people’s multiple identifications in highland Bolivia, Andrew Canessa also picks up on the interplays between “race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality [that] continue coming to the fore and then retreating; no single identity is constantly salient, and moreover informs the other” (2012: 5). Canessa further emphasizes the instability of categories of identity by noting how “people can be more or less indian, more or less female, or more or less Bolivian, depending on the context in which they find themselves” (2012: 26).

Another notable expression of how ethnic differences in Nickerie were bridged, or blurred, rather, was that dogla identity-mapping frequently referred to people's sharing of each other's ethnic origin foods (within religious restrictions, of course). Although practically all people in Nickerie ate rice, rice was labelled "ethnic food" (*etnisch eten*) according to the differing ways in which it was cooked, spiced and served. Yet ethnic food did not divide people in Nickerie along ethnic lines, but was enthusiastically shared. As I will show below, through the sharing of food people created shared spaces out of ethnic spaces.

Sharing Food

Sharing each other's foods during public celebrations was not distinctly Nickerian, as it was common in Paramaribo and perhaps in other Surinamese districts as well. It was, indeed, an example of how the slogan of Unity in Diversity was expressed in public displays of identifying with Suriname through the celebration of cultural difference (see Chapter One). Cross-ethnic exchanges involving the eating from each other's dishes, however, occurred not only during public days but – in Nickerie at least – on a daily basis. People often told me that "the Surinamese love parties and food". I soon realised that these two things were almost synonymous. Of course, people would also eat without the context of a party, but rarely the other way around. Surinamese parties such as *verjari's* (birthday parties) primarily involved eating.

Verjari's were common in Nickerie. People claimed to know each other either directly or indirectly through the friend of a friend of a relative, and as people were generally fond of *verjari's* because it was expected that there would be "delicious ethnic food" (*lekker etnisch eten*), a large part of the daily gossip was about who was having a *verjari* where and when and whether they were going to pop around for some food. Apart from *verjari's* people also enjoyed visiting people, saying that they were going for a stroll (*wandelen*) to meet people in their homes. It meant that they would casually walk past the house of a friend to see if someone was in. If so, the friend could not refuse the person to enter and have a meal. As Stuart and I soon learned, offering 'strolling visitors' a meal involved giving them cooked food – a

biscuit did not suffice, and could even be interpreted as an offence. Surrounded by particularly skilful cooks, my nerves only eased when people seemed generously to accept simple '*bakra* meals' of egg pancakes or tomato-sauce pasta. At any time, we needed to have enough groceries in the house – an empty fridge could chase away potential friends and become a mouth-to-mouth advertisement of our stinginess through gossiping Nickerie.

People's 'food strolls' were often specifically to houses of friends where they knew people cooked food 'ethnically different' from what they cooked themselves. Thus my Hindustani neighbours would say, "Are you coming for a stroll? Perhaps our friend Manuela will be home". Manuela's family was Javanese and knew how to cook tasty *saoto* soup (see also Chapter Six). Or Manuela would take me for a stroll to her Creole friend Roanna who gave us a bowl of peanut soup. Again other people, however, were clever experimenters of combining various "ethnic dishes" into mixed-style "Surinamese meals", such as serving *moksi alesi* (Creole-style mixed rice, often with brown beans and shrimps), together with *heri heri* (an Amerindian spicy mix of sweet potato with cassava and boiled banana), and *dahl* (Hindustani lentil soup).

What should be noted in this regard is the relationship between food and gender. Although strolling visitors were of both sexes, cooking was in Nickerie almost invariably done by women, regardless of their ethnic background. In practice this meant that when an uninvited strolling passenger was looking in to see if a friend was home, it was crucial for a woman of the household to be present; if the women were all out (which was usually not expected), people would simply wave or shout a greeting to men or children present, or at most have a brief "see you later"-conversation *outside* the house, and stroll on. In other words, the cross-cultural sharing of food in Nickerie did not appear to structurally affect 'ethnic' notions of kinship and associated gender roles (see Chapter Four).

References to food among people in Nickerie thus opened up a world of "Unity in Diversity", in which ethnic spaces became everyone spaces through people's

creativity in sharing and recreating each other's cuisine. In other words, the "commensality" of sharing particular foods (see Tierney and Ohnuki-Tierney 2012) was in Nickerie not a phenomenon of kinship and culture *per se*. In his discussion about kinship terms and locality in the Highland areas of New Guinea, Andrew Strathern suggested "that the concept of 'food' may be an important mediator between the concepts of identity through locality and identity through descent (as a special case of kinship)" (Strathern 1973: 33). Food, and the growing, preparation, consumption and exchange of food, has also been noted in the more recent anthropological literature of kinship as critical to definitions of family, shared household and kinship (e.g. see Carsten 1997; Leach 2003). In these understandings food takes on a role in definitions of kinship, or in definitions of what Rita Astuti (Astuti 1995a) termed "kindness".

In the context of Suriname's multicultural 'Unity in Diversity', however, the role of food seemed more complex than bridging locality and kinship. In Nickerie, food and eating were not restrictively phenomena of ethnic differentiation – unlike, for instance, the identification of foods in ethnic terms among the Zumbaguans of Highland Ecuador, where potatoes are considered a powerful symbol of Indian identity in contrast to the rice produced by white 'others' (Weismantel 1988). In Nickerie, food acted paradoxically as ethnic marker *and* as a tool with which to create inter-ethnic, or cultural, relations. Food, and the act of sharing food, thus seemed to have a complex character: both of maintaining and of dissolving ethnic boundaries. These boundaries were maintained by people explicitly referring to particular dishes as 'Creole' and 'Javanese', but they were blurred because it was not only Creole people or Javanese people eating them.

In this regard, the preparation and consumption of food in Nickerie can be understood as an example of Gerd Baumann's (1999) notion of dual discursive competence. Food served to maintain ethnic boundaries because dishes were thought of in ethnic terms, but in people's daily practice it bridged ethnic boundaries through the sharing of these dishes in communal relations. As Mintz and Du Bois noted, "Like all culturally defined material substances used in the creation and maintenance

of social relationships, food serves both to solidify group membership and to set groups apart” (Mintz and Du Bois 2002: 109). In Nickerie, food, or rather particular dishes, served to strengthen Nickerian communal belonging through the celebration and *sharing* of each others specific ethnic cuisine. Put in Astuti’s (1995a) terms of Vezo group identifications, the sharing of ethnic dishes in Nickerie was both a function of “kindedness” and of “unkindedness”.

Nickerie as Place, Nickerians in Name: Concluding Remarks

As formulated by Martin Heidegger ... the concept of *dwelling* assigns importance to the forms of consciousness with which individuals perceive and apprehend geographical space. More precisely, dwelling is said to consist in the multiple “lived relationships” that people maintain with places, for it is solely by virtue of these relationships that space acquires meaning.

Feld and Basso (1996: 54)

Gupta and Ferguson’s argument that “as places and localities become ever more blurred and indeterminate, *ideas* of culturally and ethnically distinct places become perhaps even more salient” seems a helpful one (1992: 10, emphasis in original). It is a prime example of Baumann’s (1999) notion of dual discursive competence that we *think* in categories but *behave* processually. Yet what is a “blurred place”, really? Do thoughts stop places from being? Space is relative, as Massey (2005) pointed out, and spatial boundaries are indeterminate. Phenomenologically speaking, however, how “blurry” are the mosquitoes, the rice paddies, the pesticides and the suicides in the lives of people living in Nickerie, in the place they call home?

In his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* Michel de Certeau distinguished between “place” and “space” through notions of movement and time. In his view, place is “an instantaneous configuration of positions” whereas space is “composed of intersections of mobile elements ... *space is a practiced place*” (1984: 117, italics in original). According to de Certeau, people create spaces with their movements through, or “practices” in, geographically defined places.

The identity-mapping of people in Nickerie – as the creation of spaces by people’s movement through and interaction with places – were not unlike de Certeau’s understanding of people’s everyday “practices”. Identity-mapping represented Nickerie as a geographical place with all of its physical properties, including the fertility of its grounds and its climate (as we saw in Justin’s example of the muddy ground; see also Ingold 2000; 2010). In their identity-mapping both people and place operated in a Bakhtinian dialogical interaction (see Introduction). In other words, space-making relies not only on people’s movements, as de Certeau convincingly showed, but also on the characteristics of the place.

Tim Ingold has produced various works on the physicality of space and environment in relation to meaning-making. Ingold argued that “what we are accustomed to call cultural variation ... consists of variations of *skills*” (2000: 4, emphasis in original). According to Ingold’s “dwelling perspective”, people rely on particular “skills” that are not cultural *or* biological – nurture *or* nature – but both (ibid. 4-5). We “becom[e] knowledgeable” through walking and breathing – or living – the places we interact with (Ingold 2010). Siding with Ingold, I suggest that we cannot address people’s behaviour, kinship and peoplehood without reference to their physical everyday environments, even if these are multiple.³¹ Whereas I acknowledge the risk of making an “unproblematic link between identity and place” in “[c]onventional accounts of ethnicity” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 7), I suggest that accounts of deterritorializing culture risk throwing the significance of place to identity out with the bathwater (see also Escobar 2001). Through identity-mapping, Douglas in Nickerie stressed that places were important to people’s sense of communal belonging, and could provide meaningful group identities such as “Nickerian-ness”.

Like that of many Nickerians, Marten’s understanding of his identity and of “Nickerie as home” was phenomenological, a matter of “lived experience” (Brah 1996; Jackson 1995; Mallett 2004):

³¹ Ingold’s work is perhaps a philosophy in its own right. While I agree with his ideas about ways in which the experience of the physical environment relates to a sense of belonging, Ingold’s work is unconcerned with ethnicity. Ethnicity, as well as forms of racism and other exclusionary frameworks differentiating people on the basis of their bodies, is an issue he seems to ignore in his rather a-political approach to ‘being’.

Our identity is about where and how we live, and who and what we share daily experiences with. It is about being at home in a particular place, but that place is not limited to a house. For many people it can also be the rice and the polders, or playing cricket against a team from Georgetown [Guyana]. What our ethnicity is, or that we are mixed, matters more to other people than to ourselves. What matters to us is where we belong, where we are at home, and that is the place Nickerie.

Of course, exercises of identity-mapping discussed in this chapter were also processes of boundary making, not in the least because names and naming are important elements of maps. If expressed in Baumann's (1999) idiom of dual discursive competence – despite the flexible character of identity-mapping – people in Nickerie also created fixity by naming themselves “Us Nickerians”. Unlike the systematically measured lines and grids of Nickerie's geographical surface intended by the GLIS project, identity-mappings were particularly concerned with people's everyday social and physical dwelling in Nickerie. Nevertheless, the identity-mappings located experiences of everyday dwelling within the geographical boundaries of Nickerie, with which people identified when saying: “I am Nickerian”. Not unlike the GLIS project, doglas presented Nickerie as a place providing people living in it with shared “Us Nickerians” identity. Although they questioned GLIS in the sense that it could not map Nickerie in social everyday dwelling, it was not the geographic, regional boundaries of Nickerie they disagreed with. Indeed, they emphasized geo-political boundaries through the process of identity-mapping.

But identity-mapping showed that doglas experienced Nickerian-ness in a phenomenological sense as well. They identified with Nickerie through experiences of dwelling, through their existential understanding of *dasein*, or being in a place (Heidegger 1971). This emphasis on dwelling added a layer to people's everyday life which, to certain degrees, was able to traverse both notions of national unity and ethnic diversity. Identity-mapping stressing people's daily rural environment of rice, mosquitoes and pesticides – their ‘dwelling’, so to speak – identified a Nickerian-ness distinguished from Surinamese-ness. Furthermore, through people's cross-ethnic interactions in the hospital and through sharing each other's food at *verjari's* and leisure visits to each other's houses, doglas further emphasized shared Nickerian

identity as communal, bridging ethnic backgrounds. Being Nickerian involved a communal belonging, the boundaries of which were drawn on the basis of place rather than culture, nationality or, indeed, ethnicity.

PART II

Hybridity and Ethnic Essentialism in Nickerie's Dogla Discourse

Chapter Four

“Who Lives Life Best”: Ethnic Stereotypes and Women’s Sexuality in Hindustani and Creole Families

“Real” women are never wholly contained by the categories that are meant to enclose them. ... [L]ocating [the tensions of] hybrid or *doglarized* spaces ... is crucial for revealing how racialized anxieties become displaced onto women’s bodies (imagined as the vessels for the reproduction of pure boundaries) and thus work to police and regulate women’s sexuality.

Alissa Trotz (2003: 24)

Fred Budike and Bim Mungra (1986) note that animosity between Creole and Hindustani people in Suriname can be attributed largely to contrasting ideas about which group “lives life best”. The two authors assert that pressures between these two groups have been voiced partly in disagreements about which group has contributed more to the country of Suriname, and – by implication – who can best rule it. But analysis of dogla discourse in Nickerie showed that stereotypical ideas of “who lives life best” have been expressed perhaps even more poignantly in terms of deviating notions about family reproduction, emphasizing sexual conduct of women in particular. Indeed, “women’s sexuality” proved crucial in “racialized anxieties” regarding “purity” in family reproduction (cf. Trotz 2003: 24).

In Nickerie there was lots of gossip about everyone’s family lives. The family practice of other ethnic groups was heavily criticized, while people in one’s own ethnic group were credited with running their households and raising their children properly. Though such finger-pointing about family behaviour concerned and involved all ethnic groups, this chapter focuses on Hindustani and Creole families, as these were most frequently addressed by dogla discourse in Nickerie. The chapter touches upon questions of kinship in Nickerie, but I am interested more in how dogla discourse exposed ambiguities in people’s stereotyping of ethnic gender roles and sexuality among Creole and Hindustani households.

Looking with a dual discursive lens – zooming out on stereotypical generalizations by people in Nickerie about ethnic ‘others’, and zooming in on actual family relations within the household – we will see how people’s stereotyping obscured actual practice, and that differing values of how to ‘do’ family life ‘well’ cannot be neatly structured into strict categorical ideas of ‘the ethnic family’. Through dogla discourse, people showed that although there were cultural differences in gender roles and parent-child relations, family life in Nickerie was not a matter of ethnic custom *per se*. It was rather an at times confrontational negotiation of stereotypical ethnic expectations on the one hand, and the agency of individual family members on the other, with the latter playing a decisive role in how families were moulded and reproduced rather than rigidly defined.

However, it is too simplistic to assume that we can dissolve essentialist ethnic referents as mechanisms of categorical thought alone, distinct from ‘processual’ action, as Baumann’s (1999) explanation of “dual discursive competence” would have it (see Introduction). Indeed, throughout my fieldwork – and not least where questions of kinship were concerned – people in Nickerie were not only *thinking in* but also *acting out*, or living, ethnic categories. This conflation of essentialist thinking with essentialist action was particularly hard to deny when considering racialized gender roles in Hindustani and Creole families. People in Nickerie were both questioning *and* acting out stereotypical ethnic gender roles, thereby ‘practicing essentialism’ despite ‘processual thinking’.

Below, I will first give an indication of how people in Nickerie communicated ethnic stereotypes, saying that ethnic ‘others’ lived family life badly. I will then show how ethnic stereotypes fed into public disdain for “mixed” Hindustani-Creole relationships in Suriname. I do so with reference to the Surinamese film *Wan Pipel* (One People), and illustrate the relevance of this film for understandings of ‘mixed’ relations in Nickerie with the cases of Angela and Shanti. I continue with the importance of Hindu marriage in Nickerie and the case of my neighbour Ranoushka’s ‘taboo’ divorce, highlighting the role of powerful mothers and dutiful wives in preserving stereotypical Hindustani gender roles. The subsequent part of the

chapter questions how Creole families were stereotyped as zones of matrifocality and absent fathers, followed by an interrogation of sexual moralities among Creole and Hindustani women. I conclude the chapter with a reflection on the categorization of ‘ethnic families’ in Nickerie’s dogla discourse, and its relation to Baumann’s notion of dual discursive competence.

How To Live Family Life Badly:

Finger-Pointing at The Ethnic Other in Nickerie

Family is about how to best raise your children. Doing family is the same everywhere; no matter if you are Hindustani or Creole or Javanese, doing family is like maintaining a garden plot – if you do not maintain it well your plants will perish. But there are different gardens and different ideas about how to maintain these, how to do it best. In Suriname the quarrels about how to live family life are expressed in ethnic terms, in terms of whether it is Creoles or Hindustanis or Javanese who maintain their gardens best. They always disagree.

Ella

In Nickerie, families were generally differentiated on an ethnic basis, spoken of in terms of “ethnic family customs”. The main differences tended to be expressed in ideas of female sexuality and how children should be raised. Most gossip over family customs was directed at new Chinese immigrants – not the descendents of indentured labourers who arrived from China during colonialism, but the ‘new wave’ of Chinese immigrants over the past few decades. My neighbours often pointed fingers at these families for “doing family badly”, arguing along these lines:

There are many young Chinese parents with babies here, but no schoolchildren, adolescents and elderly Chinese. Their family life is completely distorted! They send their children to Chinese schools and retire there with money earned here. They only care about money, investments and China. They sell cheaper clothes, food and goods and they build good roads. But look at their families! Scandalous how bad they do family.

The way Chinese families were stereotyped was not necessarily because they were relative newcomers. In Nickerie there was a plethora of stereotyping commentary about any ethnic group and how well or badly they lived family life. Hindustani families were said to be nepotistic, stressing money and a big house over friendships,

and obsessed with controlling family purity by ordering children as to who were suitable potential spouses. Creole families were portrayed as lazy and irresponsible, unwittingly allowing children too much freedom and thereby spoiling them. Javanese families were somewhat paradoxically understood to stick to their own group, while being known for adopting and fostering children of (un)related families, including doglas (see Chapter Five).

Often, remarks were made about people's houses and what sorts of property they valued. Hindustani and Javanese families tended to build their own houses if they had enough money to buy land. Hindustani people emphasized the importance of the size of their houses. Many Creole families in Nickerie lived in ramshackle or derelict houses initially supplied by colonial authorities for teachers and other state-funded professions. Although Creole people did complain about the state of their houses, their priorities in spending household money were rarely on repairing the house, or building their own. Instead, they prioritized items such as cars, mobile phones, and fridges.

This behaviour was caricatured by Hindustanis I spoke to, such as Dea. To buy fruits – but primarily for a chat – I frequented Dea's 'market' stall in front of her house a couple of blocks from where Stuart and I lived. Dea was proud of her house. She said her husband's family built it to accommodate both of them, as well as their three young daughters, two dogs, and a funny parrot called "Hiya" (who was given this name because he greeted anyone with a loud "hiya" as soon as he caught sight of people). Dea often talked about her house, and about how 'well' Hindustanis looked after their houses in comparison to others: "Creoles only care about flashy, 'bling bling' items to impress their lovers. They do not invest in families: look at their houses!"

Most finger-pointing around "who lives life best" in dogla discourse, however, was linked to family relations. Stereotyping comments about children in Hindustani families phrased by doglas usually ran:

Hindustani children are in prison from the moment they are born, girls in particular. In the classroom they do not dare to open their mouth. It is disturbing for teachers and scandalous when you consider the reason why: restricted childhood, forced marriages, no romantic love, no happiness. They are not allowed creativity in the ways to express themselves and learn from a young age to be nepotistic and ethnocentric, favouring Hindustani family and culture. They learn about race, to include some people and exclude others on the basis of looks. It is persistent, that behaviour. How will Suriname ever become a unity if Hindustani children are raised that way?

The quote above is taken from a conversation I had with my dogla friend Ella (see below), who had a remarkably nuanced view of ethnicity. Ella's critique of Hindustani families with regards to how children were raised, however, was common among doglas. But dogla discourse was also critical towards "typically Creole" ways, describing Hindustani family lives as "good" in comparison to "the free lifestyle" of Creole families. Thaksiya, Hindustani mother of three teenage dogla children, expressed irritation with her Creole husband somewhat contradictorily:

Hindustani families always have plenty of conflicts, but Creoles are really unaware of what it means to run a household. My husband does not *raise* children but just lets them do whatever they want. When I am working at the pharmacy he allows our daughters to hang out on the streets. Our son hardly ever listens to anything we say. They leave dirty washing lying around the house and keep walking away, doing their own thing. It is typically Creole, that walking away without bothering about things they are expected to do. They also lie that they lose money, like it just fell in the mud without them noticing it. Hindustani children behave much better. Hindustani families know how to raise children well. Hindustani children abide by rules, respect parents. Creole children pay no respect. My husband says I should not grumble... *no spang* (no worries), well, if this continues our children will soon be involved in semi-criminal behaviour (*hosselen*). I am lucky that my husband at least resides at home. Usually Creole men just wander about. I am very lucky with the way my husband behaves, that he is present rather than absent.

Thaksiya's suggestion of a Creole father's absence rather than presence in the household has been observed in various studies regarding Creole working class families in Suriname and the wider Afro-American Diaspora. From his 1956 debut on *The Negro Family in British Guiana*, Raymond Smith's work in the Caribbean – and most notably his use of the term "matrifocality", referring to the centrality of women in Creole households – has set the standard for linking Caribbean kinship

directly to gender roles. As Trouillot observed, “Caribbean kinship studies have always been gender studies” (1992: 26). My present chapter is hardly exceptional in this regard. What this chapter and dogla discourse more generally contributes to Caribbean kinship studies, however, is that it does not focus on Creole kinship, but considers gender roles and sexuality as negotiated and played out in interactions between Creole and Hindustani families.

***Wan Pipel* and the Disapproval of Mixed Hindustani-Creole Relationships**

Ella was a widowed mother of four, daughter to a Hindustani woman and Creole man. Over the course of my time in Nickerie, she shared with me both the difficult and joyful experiences of ‘being dogla’. She referred to her own birth as the result of a teenage flirtation, which had earned her mother a reputation as a *tjoetja* (whore) in her Hindustani family. Relationships with “blacks”, she said, were considered dirty at the time, because they were thought to pollute Hindustani racial purity. Ella was born in 1971, four years before Suriname’s official independence from Dutch colonialism. Following independence, the first Surinamese film which was produced showed the uneasy acceptance of mixed relationships, or at least those between Hindustani and Creole lovers: *Wan Pipel*, or One People (see Figure 20 below).

Wan Pipel (1976), written by Rudi Kross and directed by Pim de la Parra, gives a clear picture of cultural differences and ‘ethnic’ obstacles around the time of Suriname’s independence in 1975. It features a love relationship between a Creole man and a Hindustani woman, and the insurmountable difficulties their families express about it. The lead character, Roy – played by Borger Breeveld – is in a relationship with a Dutch woman when he returns to Suriname and falls in love with Rubia, a Hindustani girl played by Diana Gangaram Panday. For Panday, however, the film was not acting, but reflected her own life: “During the scenes with my film-father I was just being myself... For these scenes – and for the entire film really – I did not need to practice, it was like acting my own life”, she told Hindustani author Usha Marhé in an interview in 1993 (Marhé 2010).

Figure 20: Film Posters of *Wan Pipel* / *One People*



Source: IMDb.com³²

Following the release of the film, Panday's life in Suriname was no longer safe; she was scolded and beaten up on the street for her role and performance in *Wan Pipel*. Following a few murder attempts she fled to Germany and hid her 'Rubia-appearance' with an Afro hairstyle.³³ Unlike Panday, Breeveld did not receive any life-threatening responses to his role in the film – in contrast, as one of the sons in the politically active Breeveld family, he continued his public performance as spokesperson of Bouterse's National Democratic Party (see Chapter Two), and as manager of the Surinamese state television.

Wan Pipel is dated in the sense that during my fieldwork people's attitudes towards Afro-Asian relationships were not as excruciatingly condemning as during the time

³² <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0075411/> [accessed 2 April 2013]

³³ The importance of 'racial' hairstyles in classifications of race has been described as "hair politics" by Kaifa Roland in her discussion of the *negrificación* of Cuban identity: women may pass as lighter-coloured 'races' when hiding their hair under "elaborate headdresses that conceal the hair textures and colors that might race them otherwise" (2006: 159).

the film was made. Furthermore, popular condemnation of mixed Creole-Hindustani sexual relationships in reaction to the film had not prevented such relationships, neither then nor now (Brereton 2002; Reddock 2001). Nevertheless, dogla discourse indicated that such relationships were still frowned upon in Nickerie, especially among Hindu families (see also van Tuyl 2001). Furthermore, as I will show below, the disapproval of 'mixed' relationships remained strongly gender-laden, emphasizing the sexual conduct of women.

Angela shared with me her fear and anger about having to hide her relationship with her 'wrong' lover, Mike. Angela was a young Hindustani nurse working at the Nickerie hospital, where I first met her when I was diagnosed with dengue fever. The morning I was released from hospital she switched on the shower in the bathroom adjacent to the hospital ward I had been sharing with three other patients. Letting the water clatter loudly on the stone bathroom floor, she waved me over to the bathroom and, somewhat to my surprise, closed the door to the ward behind us. She then told me, as I recall from my fieldnotes:

My family is not allowed to know about Mike. He is Creole. I am expected to marry a Hindustani man. If I were to get pregnant... I want to run away from my family to be with Mike, marry him. Mike's mother knows about it and warns me that she does not want my brothers and uncles coming to her house throwing stones through the windows, looking for me. I am so angry. My father has been married to my mother since they were teenagers, and she has given birth to nine children, one of them dogla. Our dogla half-sister was sent to a foster family as a baby. My father has had several mistresses. Do you remember that Javanese girl I told you about? My father goes to see her after school to have sex. Nobody says anything about it, because he is a man, and if he would make her pregnant her family would look after her to prevent her from being stigmatized. My family would never do that for me, certainly not if it was Mike's child, from a Creole man. Javanese families are nicer than Hindustani families, protecting their women against stigma, but maybe therefore their girls are also often raped.

Occasionally there were newspaper announcements – and much more frequently there was gossip – about incest and other dubious sexual relations in and amongst Javanese families. I was not aware of a problematic trend of Javanese girls being raped, but perhaps I 'missed' it because it was hidden. From various talks with Javanese families in Nickerie I learned that the most important value to be obeyed

within the (extended) family was called *rukun*. It meant that family members must at all times seek to maintain harmony with the other members by suppressing expressions of anger or dissatisfaction (see also Geertz 1961). In line with this value's guiding principle, children and other young members should not be punished; even when an unwedded daughter became pregnant, which was far from encouraged, she should be supported by the family, and her 'misstep' silenced. This avoidance of conflict is what Angela interpreted as "nice" behaviour, which "therefore" invited cases of rape.

Angela's anger was directed towards her family's disapproval of her relationship with Mike because he was Creole. She seemed to suggest that adultery within a Hindustani family was less of a sin than wanting to marry a Creole man. In 'good' Hindu marriage, I was told by neighbours and pandits, both husband and wife were bound to religious restrictions forbidding adultery. Adultery taboos did not mean that extramarital affairs did not occur among both men and women, particularly so in 'strictly orthodox' Sanatan Dharm Hindu families such as Angela's (see also Ramdas 2006). Adultery in Hindustani families was frowned upon in Nickerie, but rarely seemed to lead to a break of the marriage, not even if it involved a dogla child, as in the case of Angela's parents (though her mother's extramarital baby was expelled from the household). Angela expected disapproval of her relationship with Mike from her family because he was Creole. Their relationship was to a certain extent tolerated by Mike's mother, who did not disapprove of Mike's Hindustani girlfriend per se, "but I don't want anything to do with her parents, with the Hindustani way they treat women, with Hindustani purity nonsense", she told me.

In Nickerie, aversions to Creole-Hindustani relationships were framed in a language of "who lives life best", noting that there would be too much ethnic disagreement (*etnische onenigheid*) within mixed households. Marking an intersectionality of ethnicity and gender, "ethnic disagreement" here made particular reference to female sexual restrictions and promiscuity. Angela's case shows that whilst protesting and even acting against ethnic essentialism, dogla discourse in Nickerie also held on to

stereotypical, cliché-ridden yet surprisingly persistent ideas of Hindustani families protecting an ‘ethnic purity’ directly linked to the conduct of women.

Before discussing stereotypical ideas about Creole families, below I will zoom closer into gender relations in Hindustani households, as they relate to notions of ethnic purity. Dogla discourse evoked both affirmation of and protest against stereotypical Hindustani family rules, with an emphasis on the role of powerful mothers in preserving gender hierarchies. I illustrate this contradictory stance through the case of Shanti’s family from the town of Wageningen in eastern Nickerie (see Figures 13 and 14 in Chapter Three). Taking her own family as an example, Shanti expressed aversions against blackness and mixed-marriage not unlike the sentiments the film *Wan Pipel* provoked thirty-five years earlier. Her case is exemplary of the ways in which gendered but also generational power relations were played out on the level of Hindustani households, and how these power relations constrained and framed customary ideas of “how to live life well”.

“Our Grandchildren have to be Hindustani, not Spoiled”:

The Case of Shanti, Astrid’s Mother

Astrid invited me to spend a Sunday with her parents in Wageningen.³⁴ Astrid was a school teacher whom I befriended following a research presentation I did for students of the IOL (*Instituut voor de Opleiding der Leraren*: Institute for the Education of Teachers), based at the Anton de Kom University in Paramaribo. When we arrived at her parental home in Wageningen, her mother Shanti appeared from behind the barbed wire fence of a plot occupied by twenty-odd chickens and *doksen*, to welcome us into the spacious stone courtyard located partly underneath the house, and extending towards the sandy road adjacent to the house.³⁵ In a metal pot on an earthen stove next to Shanti’s vegetable and herb garden, one of her chickens was being curried up for our roti lunch. On and off, tropical rain clattered loudly on the aluminium roof above the extended courtyard, interrupting our conversation.

³⁴ This case has been examined in a different context in a paper on anthropology and education (Marchand 2012).

³⁵ *Doks*: a large white type of duck.

Shanti's husband was not home. "He is working very hard on our rice field up the road", she explained to me, causing Astrid to fire words like bullets at her mother:

Tell her the truth! He never works hard but wastes every day getting drunk! Tell her how he treats you! I am sick of hearing you defend him. How many times have we rushed you to the hospital because he had been throwing knives at you, or hot cooking oil over your body? How he damaged your face and broke your limbs? I still wonder how he managed to get the broom through your thigh last month. We have told you a million times: leave him. He has no right to hurt you.

Shanti's head sank deeply down on to her chest. "He always apologizes when he has sobered up", she said, raising her head after a moment. Her salt-and-pepper hairs fell across her dark brown forehead. Watching an angry Astrid joining her husband and son in the hammock at the other end of the courtyard, she told me:

My daughters married into families that allow them to have jobs. Now they are always fighting with me. Astrid said that you are interested in mixed families. I want no mixing in my family. My sons have to marry good girls who obey family rules, girls that will look after me when I get old. I do not accept this girl: she is pregnant and Prem [her youngest son] wants to stay with her. The girl's mother, a black Creole Christian, died in childbirth. She was raised by her mother's sister, who is also very black. Her father is Amerindian, but the aunt took her away from his family. The baby will be spoiled, dogla; I do not want her in my family. Prem will not marry her. My grandchildren have to be Hindustani, not spoiled.

Shanti's case was not unique, but illustrative of the attitudes of several Hindustani families in Nickerie in which certain members seemed to place great values on "purity" – a purity dictated by ethnocentrism, if not racism. In saying that her grandchildren "have to be Hindustani, not spoiled", Shanti implied that *not* being Hindustani involved pollution or dirt.

Building on a definition of "dirt as matter out of place", Mary Douglas suggested that "dirt ... is never a unique, isolated event [but] a relative idea [that] includes all the rejected elements of ordered systems" (1966: 35). The baby of Prem's pregnant girlfriend was considered "dirt" or "spoiled" only in classifications explaining "Hindustani" as "pure". Furthermore, in these classifications of Hindustani

patrilineality, “family purity” was a function of gender in emphasizing “good wives”. In Shanti’s account of purity and pollution, by labelling her son’s girlfriend “spoiled”, she indicated her vision of a “pure” family which could be achieved by her sons marrying “good girls”. As Verena Stolcke noted, “Whenever social position in a hierarchical society is attributed so-called racial and hence allegedly inherent, natural, and hereditary qualities, it is essential to control the reproductive capacity of its women in order to preserve its social pre-eminence” (1994: 285). Hence the persistence in Nickerie of arranged marriage among Hindustani families such as Shanti’s.

Indeed, one of the most important duties of Hindustani parents towards their children was to prepare them for *vivaha*, their marriage (see also de Klerk 1998 [1953]). Often with reference to the ‘perfect’ marital union of the Hindu God Ram and his eternally faithful wife Sita – narrated in the Hindu epic, the Ramayana (Raghoebier 1987: 102), retold by pandits during *kathas* (Hindu rituals), and also frequently broadcast on local television in Nickerie – a woman’s *vivaha* was commitment for life. Unlike a man, she could only marry once. Divorce was strictly discouraged and affected the honour of both parental families. Despite religious strictures around arranged marriage and the ideological condemnation of divorce, however, Hindustani family lives were negotiated and judged upon context. The case of Ranoushka below is illustrative of ways in which – despite religious demands against divorce – female chastity and lack of choices among married Hindustani women in Nickerie was not as stereotypical as dogla discourse portrayed it.

“Whipping the Taboo of Divorce”:

The Case of Ranoushka, Sharda’s Daughter

When Stuart and I started living in Nickerie, Ranoushka, the eldest daughter of one of the Hindustani families next door to us, had just returned ‘home’. Ranoushka was barely seventeen years old and had been married off to a wealthy Hindustani family in Paramaribo. Her terrible confessions of being beaten up, raped and humiliated in her husband’s family caused Sharda, Ranoushka’s mother, to breach what Sharda

identified as “Hindustani rules”. Sharda told me that she “whipped” (*slaan*) a “religious taboo” by accepting her married daughter back into her Nickerie household, and arranging a divorce.

Back in Nickerie, Ranoushka began to resume schooling, joining a class with her younger sister Anie. She appeared quiet, softly spoken, and her posture bowed when she approached people. Unlike her younger siblings she seemed hesitant and shy in her demeanour. She sometimes cycled out with me to the *Zeedijk* – Nickerie’s northwestern dyke where for many years fishers have been arriving illegally in *korjaals* (long canoe-like boats) from Guyana – telling me that she wanted to show me the Ganga Mandir. My initial impression was that she only did this because her parents had told her to do so.

One morning, while we were looking out over the Corantijn River in front of the Ganga Mandir, Ranoushka told me that on the way to and from school she had been ‘noticed’ by a very handsome, attractive man:

Maybe I will get a second chance. He has Hindustani, mixed and white family, Euro-Surinamers. They are rich and very kind. They forgive me, my first marriage, that I am not a virgin. He asked my parents if I can live with his family.

A few weeks later Ranoushka started to be vehemently sick and was taken into the Nickerie hospital with critical dehydration and rapid weight loss. She was pregnant. Part of the reason Ranoushka had been mistreated by her husband’s family, according to Sharda, was that they believed that Ranoushka was infertile, “wasting eight months of marriage without pregnancy”. Ranoushka had proved that she was not infertile; but now she had to make it clear among her neighbours that the foetus was not her first husband’s, and also had to ensure that her husband’s family would not claim the baby. As Sharda said: “We really need to get things organized now: paying the pandit, getting her husband to sign the papers...” Sharda and Bayern had started the lengthy, costly and difficult arrangement of their daughter’s divorce.

By the time the child was born Ranoushka's husband had not signed the divorce papers, so Ranoushka had not been able to marry the baby's father. Customarily, so I was informed, the baby therefore still belonged to her husband's family. Sharda said that she would "personally fight all his brothers and uncles if they dare to touch that child". There was pride in Sharda's eyes when she told me about the *namakarana*, the ritual in which her first grandchild was named by the pandit following his astrological almanac (see also Bakker 1999: 74). Despite the worries of social stigma caused by Ranoushka's history of taboo-breaking, Sharda's husband Bayern had confidence that "Ranoushka will not shame her new family because she will be a good housewife and mother. She has always been dutiful and hardworking."

In dogla discourse, Hindustani women were stereotypically settled in the role of "dutiful wife". Hindustani women such as Ranoushka also seemed to act out a continuation of these stereotypical gender roles. Santoesha, who was a cleaner at DSB (*De Surinaamsche Bank*) in Nieuw Nickerie, described "the Hindustani woman" as follows:

The man naturally (*van nature*) has a different position than the woman. Regardless of how much women study or earn, how successful they are economically, women will always be lower than men. Women need to learn to accept that position; that is our duty in being a good wife. I get irritated when a woman tries to pull her husband down over behaviour that we have no control over, such as playing the cool guy towards friends and colleagues. Men should not hurt women, but I think they resort to physical force to regain control over women who get too verbal, who try to dominate them. If a woman neglects or offends her husband then he will turn against her. It will make you happier as a woman when you respect your husband. A good wife will meet a good husband, which makes family life more peaceful. All women should follow this rule. It would solve a lot of wife beating and suicides amongst Hindustani people in Nickerie.

Anie was often posed as counter-case to her dutiful sister Ranoushka. Anie had resisted all suggestions by her parents that she would need to get married. Their arguments, in loud and rapid Sarnami, often reached well beyond the boundaries of their family house. Anie explained to me that they were always fighting about marriage. "I will never marry, never bow my head to a husband!" she yelled, "I hate family pressure! I am going to finish my school and do nursing training." It was

difficult both for herself and her parents when Anie again failed her school exams. When I was asked to help her with her homework I gradually realized that Anie was not really interested in school or the nursing training. Rather, she seemed to be kicking against “family pressure” but had not quite found an appropriate avenue to express herself.

Given the variations in terms of how strictures were lived between and within Hindustani families in Nickerie, ‘the’ Hindustani family can only to some extent be identified with its stereotypical rubrics. In both the cases of Shanti’s and Sharda’s family there was the expectation that children were to respect the authority of their parents in family affairs (see also Adhin 1960: 18). Both in Shanti’s and in Sharda’s case, something locally referred to as “Hindustani rules” (*Hindostaanse regels*) was adhered to, but also violated. Respect was paid by Ranoushka through her dutifulness, as her father Bayern had said. Despite her breaking the taboo of leaving her husband, Ranoushka never disputed (not openly at least) parental authority, and she acted accordingly in always subjecting herself to family. Respect to “Hindustani rules” was also paid by Shanti’s son Prem, who did eventually abandon his pregnant girlfriend and married a Hindustani girl, as arranged by Shanti.

That Hindustani family rules were also resisted, however, can be seen in Astrid’s breach of respect for parental authority in telling her mother to leave her father because of his abuse; and in Anie’s insistent rebellion against marriage. Furthermore, whereas Shanti took a powerful stance against doglas in her family, Sharda and Bayern allowed Ranoushka not only a second chance in marriage, but the possibility of marrying a man who was not “pure Hindustani”. Overall, what the cases of Sharda and Shanti suggest is a dominant role for Hindustani mothers in directing her family’s reproduction through her children.

Assigning a powerful role to Hindustani mothers does not, of course, account for complexities of power relations between Hindustani men and women – not only as parents, but as spouses in a patrilineal structure with the father as head of the family in managing family property (Adhin 1960). Furthermore, recall the tragic physical

violence Astrid claimed her father inflicted upon her mother. Unfortunately, Astrid's was not an uncommon narrative in Nickerie, where "wife beating" was as much part of the stereotypical repertoire about Hindustani families as the importance of marriage (see Marchand 2012 for a discussion on the empowerment of Hindustani women in Nickerie through education).

Thus far, this chapter has been an ethnographic account of how dogla discourse portrayed Hindustani families, probably because somehow most of my fieldwork material relates to Hindustanis in one way or another. We lived among Hindustani families for more than a year; my contact with Creoles was less frequent. Seeking to understand Nickerie's dogla discourse in its dialogical negotiation, however, I will now turn to Thaksiya's (see page 150 above) stereotyping of the "typically Creole" behaviour of her husband by looking at how a presumed absence of Creole fathers presented itself amongst doglas in Nickerie. I will do so following an introduction of the anthropological literature regarding 'the' Creole family. I rely on literature here because my fieldwork in Nickerie did not provide much insight in Creole gender relations, or Creole family life more generally. Nevertheless, Creoles were of crucial importance in dogla accounts of "ethnic families" (*etnische families*).

In stereotyping accounts of ethnic family practice in Nickerie, patrilineal Hindustani families were often contrasted with matrifocal Creole families in stark oppositional terms, exaggerating gendered differences. Dogla discourse regarding the family centred largely on women, contrasting "the Hindustani woman" and "the Creole woman". Creole women were said to be strong and powerful, dominating men, whereas Hindustani women were said to be subservient and powerless subjects dominated by men.

As we will see, stereotypical images of the Creole family, as described in the literature, provide specific gender roles for Creole mothers and Creole fathers in running family households. What dogla discourse in Nickerie contributes to this literature is that these gender roles are remoulded when taken out of their exclusively Creole context. In considering 'mixed' Hindustani-Creole families, dogla discourse

shows how gender roles influence each other dialogically, and therefore hardly fit stereotypical representations. As I will show in the subsequent paragraph, however, dogla discourse did maintain stereotypical images of 'ethnic' gender roles with reference to women's sexuality.

Of Matrifocality and Absent Fathers: Finger-Pointing at "The Creole Family"

Although "one finds unions of all types among all classes and racial groups (though the incidence of occurrence certainly varies)" (Smith 1996: 47; Barrow 1996; Terborg 2002), studies of Caribbean kinship tend to distinguish between working-class Creole families and "westernized" elites and middle classes (Wekker 2006). The latter group's main kinship unit has been explained as nuclear family, consisting of husband with wife and children sharing a household. Nuclear families existed in Suriname, but it was not uncommon for men to have two of them. The so-called "dual marriage system" (Smith 1996: 59) developed during colonialism; white planters who had a "white wife", often also had "a Creole or black concubine" (Wekker 2001a: 176).

Quite remarkable for Suriname is that already in 1767 – exactly two hundred years before the abolition of antimiscegenation laws in the United States – the first legal marriage occurred between a free black woman and a white plantation owner because, following court discussions, there was no law found against it (McLeod 1996; Root 1996). This marriage, however, was unusual, and would not have been possible if the black woman had been enslaved. Concubinage, however, was common in colonial Suriname.

Gloria Wekker argues that whereas the dual marriage system was "a system that was inherently saturated with inequalities", from the enslaved women's viewpoint it was nevertheless "a relational arrangement that ... did produce mobility in terms of status for themselves and their children and a varying measure of freedom" (2006: 167). According to Wekker the colonial phenomenon of the *buitenvrouw* (outside woman)

remains a typical feature of Creole kinship. She notes: “In the course of later centuries the basic pattern has not only been adopted by prosperous men [but] found its way to men of different classes” (ibid. 163; see also Smith 1988, 1996).

Indeed, among Creoles of lower socio-economic standing the occurrence of one or more (unmarried) *buitenvrouwen* was not uncommon. It was characteristic of matrifocal Creole families in Suriname that men and women often were not married at all, but had one or more recognized sexual relationships. The mother was portrayed as the central family figure, with the father having only a marginal position in the household and in care for children. As Wekker explained, “[the] most important relationship is not the conjugal one, between wife and husband, but the relationship between a grandmother, her sons and daughters and the children of the daughters” (Wekker 2001a: 187-8; see also Choenni 1982).³⁶ In other words, for Creole women motherhood “was and is” more important than wifehood (Wekker 2006: 167).

Furthermore, often the father did not permanently share the household but was a so-called “passenger”, only occasionally visiting the household(s) of his children. In their explanation of Creole matrifocality, Herskovits and Herskovits (1936) traced the ‘loose’ household relations between men and women and the large number of children per household to “African survivals”, or to African cultural traditions of polygamy and the emphasis on motherhood over parenthood, which slaves had brought with them to the New World (Terborg 2002). Wekker speaks in this regard of “unconscious West African ‘grammatical’ principles ... in the domains of subjecthood and sexuality” (2006: 72; see also Wekker 2001a).

Others have explained an absence of fathers in Creole households not as ‘cultural principle’, but in terms of high unemployment and low wages forcing men to find work elsewhere (Budike and Mungra 1986; but see Pierce 1971 for a counter argument). Another interpretation is that it was a survival strategy in the New World, encouraged by pressures to adapt to western (colonial) norms. Characteristic in this

³⁶ See also Chamberlain (2003) about the role of grandparents, particularly grandmothers, in Caribbean families.

regard is Peter Wilson's (1973) "respectability-reputation" model, in which he (in extremely dualistic terms) explains male Creole behaviour as "reputation"-oriented, unable to conform to western standards; and female Creole behaviour as "respectability"-oriented, valuing western standards (see also Brana-Shute 1979; Buschkens 1973).

Earlier studies, such as Edith Clarke's influential *My Mother Who Fathered Me* (1957), tended to represent Creole families in pathological terms. These studies took the western ideal-typical nuclear family as a standard against which to gauge other household compositions. Female-centred, single-parent Creole families were interpreted as unstable, with loose sexual morals judged to be problematic, preventing the socio-economic advancement of the Afro-American population (see also Patterson 1998). Based on her fieldwork among a black community in the United States, Carol Stack (1974), however, argued that Afro-American families were not dysfunctional because they found strong socio-economic support in their extended network of kin and friends.

Ethnographically pertaining to Jamaica, Clarke's book was influential not only in international academic spheres but also in wider social policy. Mindie Black, for instance, stumbled upon *My Mother Who Fathered Me* "cited in [Antiguan] legislator's discussions about kinship rights and responsibilities", noting that "the book's title has become a euphemism for the social welfare 'problem' of too many impoverished women supporting – 'fathering' – too many children" (1995: 52). According to Black, "the language used by Antigua's lawmakers to describe West Indian families [is] like the anthropology of an earlier generation: it is oblivious of the complexities of Antiguan family and gender organisation." (1995:52)

Understandings of the mother-centred Creole family in the Caribbean as a 'family in crisis' have been nuanced by later studies explaining the relative socio-economic marginality of the Creole working class – not in terms of deviant sexual morals, but in light of specific historical, social and cultural conditions (e.g. see Barrow 1996; Brown and Chevannes 1998; Buschkens 1973; Mintz and Price 1992 [1976]). The

Dutch anthropologist and historian Rudolf van Lier (1977) understood Creole matrifocality in Suriname to be a result of the colonial period of slavery, during which colonial authorities forbade marriage between male and female slaves. White planters separated male slaves from the children they had ‘fathered’, for instance by selling them to another plantation. According to van Lier this resulted in a strong bond between a slave mother and her children, who were not separated. (The effects these practices may have had on restricting the desire for familial bonding among male slaves do not seem to have been given equal attention.)

Earlier studies described the Creole domestic domain and socio-economic marginality through a structural-functionalist lens. Yet, as Black notes in her critical *My Mother Never Fathered Me* commentary on Edith Clarke’s book, structural-functionalist explanations based on an assumption of “middle class marriage and the nuclear family as normative ... misses the complexities of gender ideology and practice, lacks historical perspective, and ignores issues of power and hierarchy” (Black 1995: 49-50). Black argues that if Caribbean kinship is understood on its own terms, “women do not father children because gender hierarchy and kinship norms in West Indian societies value and determine differentially what men and women do – including how they raise children” (1995:51). She says: “fathers rather than mothers exercise ‘real’ discipline in Antigua and Barbuda. West Indian parents regularly use corporal punishment and I heard often the comment ‘spare the rod, spoil the child’ [and] ‘wait till ya pappy cum’” (ibid. 63). According to Black:

Such threats are kinship events that make fathers the central authority figures and chief disciplinarians of the family. They teach children where ‘real’ power resides. In sharp contrast to the behaviour that constitutes fathering, what mothers do to feed, clothe, train, and discipline children every day is not received or perceived as a ‘gift’; it is natural, unremarked. Alliances between mothers and children are not marked by specific kinship events equivalent to ‘going for the money’, ‘taking a child’ or meting out ‘real’ punishment. (1995: 63)

Black understands the Creole father role to be the provider of important commodities to biologically recognized children, while not sharing their household. Black’s ethnographic material on father-centred “kinship events” did resemble parent-child

patterns in some of the Creole families I encountered in Nickerie. One of the most common events was “going for the money”, in which mothers sent young children to their father to ask politely for money, household necessities and presents. I also noticed that when older Creole children managed to find paid employment they would not hesitate to give part of that income to their mother, contribute to household costs, or buy her presents. When I asked why they did not give anything to their father, doglas told me that “in Creole families it doesn’t work that way”, that “men give money and presents to their women and children, children give money and presents to their mother, and mothers do everything else. That is how Creole families work”.

The extremity in gender hierarchy as suggested by Black in the case of Creole working class families in Antigua and Barbuda, however, was not apparent in dogla discourse in Nickerie. Dogla discourse sheds a different light on stereotypical Creole gender hierarchies in accounts from and about ‘mixed’ families involving Hindustani mothers and Creole fathers. As I will show with the examples below, in some cases the father was literally absent throughout the life of a child, as with Shammy and Ruth; in other cases the father was not the “chief disciplinarian of the family” as Black would have it, but relatively marginal indeed, as with Natalie.

Shammy

I met Shammy through my engagement with the Volkshogeschool (see Introduction). When I expressed my interest in what it meant to be ‘dogla’ in Suriname, Shammy said that I should know the story of his dogla mother. He told me that his mother had had a difficult youth with her Hindustani family in Guyana because she was the ‘bastard’ child of her mother from a Creole lover. His mother had come to Nickerie when she left school, hoping that she could start life without the bastard stigma. When she became pregnant with Shammy, from a Creole man in Suriname, her mother chose to foreclose any further contact, hurting Shammy’s mother deeply. When I met Shammy he was in his late thirties and had never met his father, who – according to his mother – had left Nickerie just after she told him that she was pregnant. However, he had never met any of his mother’s relatives either. He knew

none of his mother's six siblings, had no idea how many cousins he might have, either in Guyana or Suriname. "It is not a Creole thing", he said, explaining that his "lack of ancestors" was not just down to his father's absence, but also to "the racism of my mother's Hindustani relatives".

Ruth

Ruth's childhood was marked by extreme poverty. Her Hindustani mother had been disowned by her relatives when Ruth was born, a dogla child of a Creole father. Her father left them a year later, while her mother was pregnant with Ruth's younger sister. He occasionally returned to see his two dogla daughters but never gave them money. "He always said that he did not have any, that he was extremely poor himself", Ruth recalls. "He said that he travelled far afield in search for work." Ruth, fifty years old, remembered her childhood as "years of an almost constant emotional pain, years of loneliness, hopelessness and lack of self-esteem". When she completed her primary school with remarkably good results, the school awarded her with a bursary to continue into secondary education in Paramaribo (in those days Nickerie did not have secondary schools). The school also paid to repair the leaking roof and subsiding walls of her mother's rickety wooden hut. From then onwards, Ruth's life changed. Following her secondary school education she trained as physician, had several jobs in hospital departments and at reproductive health and family planning bureaus. She returned to Nickerie to marry her Creole childhood boyfriend, and by the time I met them they had a seventeen year old daughter. According to Ruth her husband is a faithful, loving and caring partner and father. She said, "We are not rich but we are the family we had always dreamed of as children, the type of family you get among richer city Creole people, which is a home with father, mother and child".

Natalie

Another case was presented to me by my dogla friend Natalie, which was anomalous perhaps in stereotypical terms, but not exceptional in Nickerie. This case does not counter Black's argument that mothers do not father, but it does undo her presentation of the Caribbean father role as one of "authority". The relationship of Natalie's father with his family was not one of authority, nor of loose sexual

freedoms, but of ‘dependency’. Natalie worked as a receptionist for a local GP but hoped to study psychology in Paramaribo when she had enough money together. I visited her at home where she lived with her Hindustani mother and two younger brothers in a tiny derelict wooden pole house along the Achterdam, the main road dividing Nieuw Nickerie and the Van Pettenpolder.

My father does not live here. He became a junkie. He is at his sister’s house, not far from here. It is cocaine. Cocaine is a big problem. Many young people also go into it (*gaan daarin*). They have friendships with normal people but still they go into it. My father used to live here, but started to do strange things. He sold household items: our beds, cupboards, the fridge and television, even our clothes and school books. He wanted to buy cocaine. At his sister’s place he sleeps in a shed at the back of the yard. They keep their doors locked. Nobody trusts him anymore. I’m worried that he might die. He is emaciated, sick. But he stole and sold my mobile phone, for cocaine. I worked months to get money for that phone.

The examples of Black’s “kinship events” of Creole fathers as “central authority figures”, and the Nickerie cases of Natalie’s dependent father, the absent fathers of Shammy and Ruth, Ruth’s ‘nuclear family husband’ and also Thaksiya’s husband as ‘present’ rather than ‘absent’ father (see above) show that ‘the’ Creole father cannot be easily identified. For all of Thaksiya’s presentation of her Creole husband as “typically Creole”, Creole men with mixed families in Nickerie did not seem to follow a particular norm. Thaksiya’s account was self-contradictory; and so was the shiftiness of the ‘typical Creole man’ in dogla discourse. Natalie’s father perhaps exemplifies a stereotypical image of the “marginal Afro-Caribbean man” in socio-economic and educational spheres (Chevannes 2001; Miller 1991). He was further marginalized in his relation to his relatives and did not fit an “image of the Afro-Caribbean man as ‘walking phallic symbol’” (Terborg 2002: 2).

According to Terborg, several anthropological studies have suggested that “poor Creole men who cannot achieve status out of work because of long-term unemployment, create an alternative source of status, being the demonstration and development of sexual charms and skills” (ibid. 2). Terborg reassessed this conclusion by pointing out that regardless of socio-economic issues a man’s sexual behaviour also ties into that of women’s sexual behaviour, not only in terms of

status, but also of passion. Below, I will explore ‘ethnic’ sexualities in Suriname with particular attention to women’s experiences of sexual relations. In dialogue with Creole engagements in “the *mati* work” (see below), this final section also ties back to my earlier ethnographic material on dogla discourse regarding gender relations in Hindustani families.

Crimes of Passion and “The *Mati* Work”:

Gendered Moralities in Creole and Hindustani Sexualities

During the nineteenth century ... [East] Indian women were reputed for their sexual indiscretions. The sources are riddled with examples of women who left their husbands and/or had multiple sexual partners ... According to an article published in a Trinidadian newspaper during the 1880s, because [East] Indian men had “a very small proportion of their country women with them and betraying *a natural aversion to forming connectors with strange women*, cause for jealousy became but too frequent ... It is in this context then, that many of the murders committed against women by men occurred. Most of these murders could quite easily be labelled “crimes of passion”.

Audra Diptee (2003: 3, my emphasis)

In the first year of Hindustani migration to Suriname in 1873, three times more men than women arrived in Suriname (Helman 1995 [1983]). In subsequent years Hindustani men continued to outnumber female Hindustani immigrants. “Why”, asked Audra Diptee in a paper on “Indo-Afro” sexual relationships in late nineteenth century Trinidad and British Guiana,

[did] the pressures of a female deficient [East] Indian community [fail] to prevail over culturally inscribed, prejudicial notions of race [?] ... If the circumstances of the new environment “emancipated” [East] Indian women from traditional gender restrictions, why weren’t [East] Indian men also “freed” from the cultural traditions that opposed racial exogamy? (2003: 2)

In Nickerie it was generally acknowledged that recognized relationships between a Hindustani woman and a Creole man occurred a lot more frequently than the other way around. My dogla friend Ketty (see Introduction) knew many people in Nickerie but said that she knew of no cases in which a Creole woman lived with a Hindustani man. A common explanation for this occurrence was that it was due to ethnic

differences in ‘domination’ and ‘subversion’ in Hindustani and Creole gender relations. Ketty insightfully explained:

People in Nickerie often say that Creole women are strong and socially and sexually active with multiple partners, dominating their household and family. These women presumably scare Hindustani men who like to dominate their wife and family. This is how people arrive at the conclusion that Creole men and Hindustani women are both the weaker gender within their own ethnic groups. They say they have emotional issues which they resolve through fulfilling sexual and emotional desires elsewhere – in finding each other. It is rare in Nickerie to see cases in which a Creole woman *lives* with a Hindustani man, but sexual encounters do happen between them. They just choose not to share a household together. That’s the difference. When Creole men and Hindustani women are in a relationship they tend to cohabit, often because for Hindustani girls the chances of being accepted back into their Hindustani family are unlikely if she falls in love with a black man. And maybe not all Creole men like to be as trivial in his wife’s household and their children as Creole women may want them to be.

Ketty seemed aware of discrepancies between stereotypes and actual practices in dogla discourse. By “empowering” stereotypically “weaker genders” in her explanation, however, she was not clear why Hindustani men and Creole women “just choose not to share a household together”. I will turn to Creole women more extensively below, but will ask first what motivations Hindustani men may have in terms of avoiding co-habitation with Creole women.

When recalling Shanti’s son Prem, stereotypical assumptions that Hindustani men were the ‘stronger’ sex in patrilineal Hindustani families warrants questioning. Despite her anger with her father’s physical abuse of her mother, Astrid told me:

Prem envies me and my sister because we are daughters rather than sons. We do not need to suffer so much from our mother’s restrictions. He said I can do anything I want because I am a woman. I don’t have to live up to an impossible expectation of supporting a family, supporting *the whole family* including our parents. Financially, politically, religiously... He feels that pressure. He knows that mother’s restrictions will count hard on his wife as well, pressuring her for children and dutiful housework. He does not mean any harm to his wife, it’s such a young girl, but he cannot argue with mother. Family is about gender, but it is also about age... mothers are more powerful than their sons.

Prem's experience with his mother suggests that reasons why Hindustani men may not easily marry Creole lovers could be down to a dominating influence of their mother over family issues of "purity". A Hindustani mother – particularly if she was the oldest woman in the household – did not fit the stereotypical expectation of subservience in patrilineal Hindustani families: mother ruled. Of course, she rarely had 'family power' over her husband, but more so over her sons and her son's children. According to Astrid, family was about power, gender and age. How these roles were negotiated in Nickerie was more complex than following strict definitions of hierarchy.

An important point Ketty made, was that cohabitation and marriage patterns may obscure actual sexual relations between men and women (and between women and women engaged in "the *mati* work": see Wekker 2006 below). Indeed, according to colonial census reports, Hindustani men 'produced' more mixed children than Hindustani women did (Diptee 2003). Not only among Hindustani immigrants, but on colonial plantations overall, male-female ratios were skewed towards male workers. Male African slaves outnumbered female African slaves, and men outnumbered women amongst Chinese and Javanese indentured labourers (Buddingh' 2012; Helman 1995 [1983]). Thus a shortage of women was not an 'ethnic phenomenon', but characteristic of plantation society more generally. Nevertheless, "crimes of passion" have not been recorded to the same extent for other groups, and were explained to me as "typically Hindustani", demanding wives to be virginally pure and decent without personal desires for sexual passion.

Family expectations of Hindustani men's sexual expressions and adventures seemed less strictly bound to sexual decency. I recall Ranoushka's nervous giggle in reaction to the horrified expression on my face when telling me:

My husband's younger brothers came to the bedroom, my husband telling them what to do, front and back and in my throat. Slapping and kicking me they left me puking on the ground, crawling in my blood, telling me that I was bad sex (*ze zeiden dat ik slechte sex was*), that they needed another girl to learn good sex. I hated sex at my husband's house. I wanted to be dead, a dead body. That is why I ran away, came back to Nickerie. When his brothers

were disappointed in my body my husband sent them to Creole girls. He said that Creole women are hot, that they know everything about good sex.

According to Diptee “the aversion of [East] Indian men towards women from the Afro-Creole community [is] somewhat exaggerated in the existing scholarship” (2003:8). In challenging historical accounts which tend to explain a presumed lack of relationships between Hindustani men and Creole women as being down to racist Indian attitudes, Diptee further argued that “the Afro-Creole woman also played a decisive role in negotiating sexual relationships – interracial or not” (ibid. 15). Gloria Wekker’s work among working-class Creole women in Paramaribo is particularly illustrative here. Wekker’s (2006) ethnography provides a uniquely detailed account of *a mati wroko* (“the *mati* work”) in which women prefer multiple sexual partners and bisexual relationships over legal marriage, and “the sex of the object of one’s passion is less important than sexual fulfilment per se” (ibid. 72). In other words, Wekker suggests that women who are involved in the *mati* work are less concerned with legalized marriage than with maintaining friendships with multiple sexual partners, including bisexual relationships.

Diptee referred to “crimes of passion” to denote nineteenth century murders of women by men. In certain Hindustani circles in twenty-first century Nickerie, the sexual passions of Hindustani women – as “indiscretions” – were considered crimes in themselves. Passionate desires outwith the prescribed rules of marriage and decency were unacceptable. To conceive of passion as a criminal act stands as clear cultural difference to Wekker’s account of the “politics of passion” amongst working-class Creole women. Drawing upon research by the Herskovitses, by Mintz and Price, by Wooding, and on her own experience of the *mati* work, Wekker observed that: “Both men and women are considered full sexual subjects, who can and should act on their desires” (2001a: 188).

In her later ethnographic monograph, Wekker, clear and candid, shares her personal experiences with the *mati* work largely through an account of the life history of “Misi Juliette”. Wekker’s work and *mati* relationship with Juliette has been crucial to her understanding of Creole women’s “sexual culture” as “politics of passion”.

Unlike Black's (1995) suggestion of male dominance in Creole kinship in Antigua and Barbuda (see above), according to Wekker "there may be less significance to the fact that the honour is reserved for the man than to the fact that the woman is indicating her readiness to have babies" (2006: 27). Indeed, Wekker counters the assumption that women engaged in "the *mati* work ... because of the absence of men" (2006: 22): "Whereas the literature ... attributes the origins of the *mati* work to the psychological and physical unavailability of men and their penchant for *buitenvrouwen*/outside women, Juliette gives another impression. She was the piper who called the tune." (ibid. 37)

The *mati* work amongst Creole working-class women contrasts with the importance of arranged marriage in Hindustani families, as I illustrated earlier in this chapter with the examples of Shanti and Ranoushka. Indeed, if secret sexual encounters such as in Angela's relationship with Mike led to "crimes of passion" in Hindustani families, to Creole working-class women it likely be understood as part of the *mati* work. In this context Wekker points at the constructiveness of sexuality (see also Foucault 1978):

Instead of understanding passion and sexuality as "natural" phenomena, as God-given, context-free, and eternal, the title [of her book: *The Politics of Passion*] is a reminder that sexuality in a particular setting is something that people shape collectively on the basis of their cultural archives and changing political and economic circumstances. (2006: 67)

Perhaps, then, what dogla discourse in Nickerie exposed about "how to live family life well", related to cultural conceptions of sexuality. Of course not all Creole women engaged in the *mati* work, and not all Hindustani people conformed to Hindu values of maintaining "ethnic purity" in their relationships. As Trotz put it, "'Real' women are never wholly contained by the categories that are meant to enclose them" (2003: 24). Ethnic stereotypes about how people lived family life structured societal norms and cultural values, whereas actual practices within and between families in Nickerie deviated from or confirmed these norms and values depending on the 'politics' between individual members.

Categorizing the Nickerian Family: Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have set the scene of sexual and marital relationships in and between Creole and Hindustani families in Nickerie, focusing on how ideas of ethnic miscegenation were expressed in dogla discourse. Of course, individual households personify multiple layers of difference that cannot simply be explained in cultural or ethnic terms. Gossip between households in Nickerie, however, emphasized “ethnic differences” (*etnische verschillen*) in terms of whose family life was “best”. Stereotypical representations of the Hindustani way to live family life well, was for parents to prepare children for marriage, for brides to be fertile, for daughters to provide unconditional care for their husband’s relatives, and for sons to discharge their socio-economic duties towards their family. By contrast, stereotypical accounts of the Creole family emphasized that to live family life well, marriage was not a necessary requirement for sexual relationships – including the *mati* work – and raising children.

In practice, however, Hindustani families adhered less to set religious rules of how kinship ought to be lived, than to an everyday form of household politics expressed both in assumptions and in contestations of gender and age hierarchies, as ardent confrontations between family members in how family roles ought to be and were actually lived. There was friction in living family life “well” regarding “ethnic customs” that were pressed by some but challenged by other family members. Illustrated by the cases in this chapter, dogla discourse in Nickerie showed that when family interactions entered the propinquity of mixed relationships, there was both an accentuation and contestation of ethnic stereotypes.

This mutual occurrence of contestation and affirmation of ethnic and ‘mixed-ethnic’ categories is not necessarily contradictory. Arguments about ethnic differences portrayed in stereotypical forms and essentialized thinking interrelate with people’s actions, which cannot be captured in fixed categories. This interaction between essentialism and constructivism corresponds to Baumann’s (1999) dual discursive competence idea. To a certain extent I am keen to agree with Baumann. Dual

discursive competence applies to the case of ethnic relations in Nickerie in the sense that people, both doglas and ‘others’, tended to think in essentialist racial categories while behaving in processual, constructive manners.

However, in expanding dogla discourse concerning post-colonial formations of ethnic categories, ethnicized state politics, and experiences of naming and spatial dwelling (Part I) onto questions of intimate family relations, a model of dual discursive competence seems increasingly difficult to defend. As I have shown in this chapter, to some extent people in Nickerie were not only speaking and *thinking* in ethnic stereotypes but, indeed, also ‘*living*’ ethnic categories, most notably through conforming to stereotypical gender roles.

Of course, my ethnographic examples may also contribute to this representation of people’s acting upon ‘ethnic orders’. Writing about gender, race, and the family in Guyana, Trotz argued:

Ideas about the family are intimately connected to ideas about “ethnic”/“cultural” differences, and the images of different families bequeathed to us by much of the early and some of the later social science literature have helped in no small way to naturalize this connection. (2003:6)

Indeed, academic writings perhaps represent a reversal of Baumann’s dual discursive competence idea to the extent that they, in the *process* of writing, essentialize blurry realities into categoric thought. For instance, Daniel Miller’s observation that in Trinidad “actual ethnic distinctions in familial practice have drastically reduced” (Miller 1994: 143), is an argument of ethnic essentialism in the claim that “actual ethnic distinctions”, whether “reduced” or not, can be linked to concrete “familial practice” rather than simply deployed as an analytical category. This reification of ethnicity is an example of the risky business of academic writing, translating concepts into concreteness, or making, as Brackette Williams aptly pointed out, our categories “alive” (Durão and Bastos 2012).

In this chapter I have portrayed Creole and Hindustani gender roles as key terms of ethnic difference in Nickerian families. The chapter therefore, of course, presents

only a limited contribution to the vast field of anthropological kinship studies in wider theoretical frameworks. This thesis is not a study of kinship, however, and although the next chapter does briefly consider how doglas experienced childhood and adolescence, it concentrates on people's concern with racialized bodies and beauty in dogla discourse rather than on questions of relatedness.

If Hindustani and Creole stereotypical representations of 'the other' were blunt, or even racist, fingerprinting at doglas was possibly worse. Williams' (1991) depiction of *dooglas* being referred to as "crab-dogs" in the rural village of Cockalorum in Guyana is telling in this regard:

East Indians are sometimes referred to as "crabs" – 'deeply entwined in one another's lives, and jealously clawing and pulling one another down' – whereas Africans are sometimes referred to as "dogs" – 'individualistic, greedy, and quick to fight over a bone'. Those who employ this type of categorisation describe *Doogla* people ('a term applicable to all Guyanese of mixed descent but most often used to identify those of combined African and East Indian descent') as "crab-dogs", 'presumably having acquired the worst traits of both ethnic worlds'. (1991: 102)

In Nickerie, mixed relationships – and doglas – seemed more problematic in Hindustani families than in Creole or Javanese families. As we have seen in this chapter, different families had different ideas about mixing and ethnic purity. In the next chapter, I will show that doglas in Nickerie were not only racialized on the basis of their mixed-descent. Dogla discourse in Nickerie presented a questioning of what constituted dogla bodies, contrasting these in biological and visual terms. Indeed, as the next chapter will discuss, dogla discourse racialized the dogla body (and *every* body) in Nickerie not only in terms of genetic descent, but also as a 'visually cultured' body couched in racial terminology.

Chapter Five

The Wavy Curl of “Real” Doglas: Racialized Bodies and Beauty in Dogla Discourse

The textbooks of classical, eighteenth-century raciology were studded with images. ... It raises the interesting possibility that cognition of ‘race’ was never an exclusively linguistic process and involved from its inception a distinctive visual and optical imaginary ... My concern here is not with the well-known history of those necessarily doomed attempts to produce coherent racial categories by picking representative combinations of certain phenotypes: lips, jaws, hair texture, eye-color, and so on. It is far more interesting that this race-producing activity required *a synthesis of logos with icon, of formal scientific rationality with something else – something visual and aesthetic* in both senses of the word. Together they resulted in a specific relationship to, and mode of observing, the body.

Paul Gilroy (2000: 35, my emphasis)

I first met Vanessa in the shaded garden adjoining her parents’ house in Nickerie. She had been residing in Paramaribo for almost a year, studying economics at the Anton de Kom University. Vanessa did modeling work to help finance her studies:

Look, for this photo shoot I had my body tattooed all over, apart from my face. I was covered without wearing clothes. I had to put on shoes, nice shoes, ugly shoes, all sorts of shoes. The photos were for shoe business. It took six artists to paint my body. It was very precise, professional, a bit like *mehendi*, but with all sorts of different colours and it washed off quite easily after a few days. I do not agree to real tattoos because if I hide my skin, I hide my dogla body.

Vanessa’s brother Armand had invited me to come to the house to see his sister “because she is a *real* dogla”. The response to my confusion about Armand’s suggestion that Vanessa was more “real” dogla than him was that looks were decisive. Armand explained:

I don’t look like a mix of Suriname’s races (*een mix van Suriname’s rassen*). I pass as Hindustani because of my Hindustani body. For people who don’t know me it is difficult to see that I am mixed. Vanessa has the green eyes of

our father's Dutch mother, the light brown skin and facial shape of our father's Hindustani father, the wavy curl (*golvende krul*) giving away the curly hair (*kroeshaar*) of our mother's Maroon father, and the slender build and elegant hip swing of our mother's Javanese mother. This is what makes real doglas (*echte doglas*) so beautiful: that you can see the mix of Suriname's races.

This chapter discusses the distinction made in Nickerie's dogla discourse between understandings of being dogla as a matter of having mixed descent (*gemengde afkomst*), and being a so-called "real" (*echte*) dogla as *looking* mixed (*gemengd uiterlijk*). Armand and Vanessa were both understood to be dogla because of their mixed descent; but only Vanessa qualified for the added label of being a "real" dogla because – unlike her brother – she "looked mixed". Vanessa had "dogla looks"; Armand had "Hindustani looks". Effectively, then, 'being dogla' was more than one phenomenon, because people collectively referred to as dogla were united in an interpretation of their mixed descent, but distinguished on the basis of bodily appearance.

My argument in this chapter considers Paul Gilroy's (2000) comment (and widespread Western assumption) that "race-production" requires a synthesis of "formal scientific rationality" with "something visual and aesthetic" (2000:35, see quote above). Dogla discourse in Nickerie showed that a *lack* of this "synthesis" worked to produce a dogla category that was seen as "no race" (*geen ras*), but that was extremely racialized nevertheless. People collectively referred to as "dogla" formed a category of reference defined as having mixed Creole-Hindustani descent, but not all people within this category were recognized as having real dogla bodies in a visual and, indeed, aesthetic sense.

Dogla discourse portrayed race in a visual and aesthetic sense, for sure; Vanessa's body was presented as an icon of being "real dogla". Vanessa's brother Armand, however, was referred to as "dogla", but he was not depicted as dogla icon. The term 'dogla', as logos, thus did not synthesize with a particular bodily image. Siding with Gilroy's contention that "race" needed "a synthesis of ... formal scientific rationality with ... something visual and aesthetic", then, people in Nickerie explained the

‘discrepancy’ between linguistic and visual identification of doglas as an indication of doglas not being a race (*doglas zijn geen ras*).

As we saw in Chapter Four, dogla discourse in Nickerie stresses stereotypical notions of ethnic purity, with doglas representing an ‘impure’ category of mixed-descent. As I will show in this chapter, people in Nickerie seemed extremely concerned with the visual body, with “real dogla” versus “racial” bodily aesthetics couched in that very terminology of ‘purity’. I will argue that despite the notion of impurity attached to the dogla category of mixed-ness, the visual identification of dogla bodies made “real dogla” a remarkably ‘pure’ phenomenological category because people relied on specific, locally recognizable visual features through which “real doglas” could be distinguished from “people with racial looks” (*mensen waarin je het ras ziet*).

This chapter is divided into four sections. First, I will show how dogla discourse racialized *everybody* in Nickerie, such that doglas and others were all part of the same racialized discourse of “somatic norms” (Hoetink 1962, 1967). I will then discuss reifications of race and mixed-race in Nickerie’s dogla discourse.³⁷ The third section shows how the dogla body was subjected to visual and behavioural characterization starting in childhood and early adolescence. In the fourth section, I concentrate on visual expressions of the racialized body in dogla discourse with an emphasis on the ambiguity of ‘ethnic’ beauty contests and bodily change through facial whitening creams. I conclude with a restatement of my main argument regarding the slippage of race both as bodily appearance and as ethnic category in Nickerie’s dogla discourse.

“Somatic Distance” and the Racialized Body in Dogla Discourse

On a morning in mid-August, 2009, Glenn and I were sitting on one of the wooden benches in front of the local council building in Nickerie. While we were questioning the substantial price differences of *bakkeljauw* (dried white fish) on the market

³⁷ The terms race (*ras*) and mixed-race (*gemengd ras*) were used locally. For ease of reference, I will present these terms in this chapter without the repeated use of single or double quotation marks, while recognizing its deeply problematic undertones.

compared to *bakkeljauw* in Chinese shops, he waved to a young woman passing on a bicycle: “Psssssst! Ey sweetie!” He then turned to me saying “Oh Javanese ladies have gorgeous bodies; they are the most beautiful race of Suriname!” When I raised my eyebrows at his emphasis on race, Glenn said that his father “is Creole race” and his mother “Hindustani race”, and that because of their “mixed descent”, he and his twin brother Wesley “are no race”.

In Nickerie people frequently used the word *ras* (race), to differentiate between ethnic groups. However, it was also a reference to phenotype; most notably skin colour and hair structure, but also facial shape and bodily build. Whereas Glenn was suggesting that doglas were “no race” because of their mixed descent, Nickerie’s dogla discourse also presented doglas as “not being race” because “they don’t look alike” (*ze niet op elkaar lijken*). Or actually, it was a locally perceived ‘confusion’ around descent and looks that caused people in Nickerie to categorize doglas as “no race”. Armand said to me: “Vanessa and I are no race because we look different despite having the same parents, the same genes (*dezelfde ouders, dezelfde genen*)”. This line of reasoning was justified against a racialized context in which specific – though overly generic – somatic similarities of skin tone, hair structure, facial shape and body build were attributed to people assigned *with* “race”.

In the previous chapter I examined the ways that dogla discourse in Nickerie explained aversions towards mixed ethnic relations in terms of how to live family life “well”. Objections were also expressed in terms of what Harry Hoetink (1962, 1967) called “somatic norms” (*somatische normbeelden*) and “somatic distance” (*somatische afstand*). In his study of “race relations” (*rasrelaties*), in the Caribbean, Hoetink explained a group’s somatic norm as “those somatic characteristics that are considered the norm and ideal by the members of that group” (1962: 9), involving an aesthetic judgment of the members of one’s own group. Somatic distance referred to the extent to which another group’s somatic norm was experienced as deviating from one’s own group’s somatic norm (van Renselaar 1963).

Whereas amongst my neighbours in Nickerie, spouses of children were to ‘be’ Hindustani in a religious and lifestyle sense, they were also judged upon criteria of whether they were “racially good”. If a family allowed their children a certain religious freedom in choosing their spouse, criteria depended on the wealth of the proposed spouse (recall Ranoushka’s lover, see Chapter Four), but also on looks. Among my Hindustani neighbours, a common excuse made for mixed-race unions, was that a rich and light-coloured (*lichtgekleurde*) non-Hindustani was better than a poor, dark (*donkere*) Hindustani. But they particularly discouraged marriages with black Creole or Maroon spouses, even if these were relatively well-off. Dogla discourse – as articulated by my neighbours – thus pointed towards a thinking about family not only in socio-economic but also in racist terms.

Clarence, one of my Creole acquaintances working at the Anton de Kom University in Paramaribo, was married to a Hindustani woman. He told me that her family had terrible difficulties with this marriage because of “somatic pollution”:

The anti-negro idea rules strong in her family. This is how they think of me: that man is as black as the night, as black as Rawan’s Dyasus, that man will pollute our race, bring bastard children.³⁸ My hair is curly, her face is oval, we have different bones and muscle structures. They believe we do not match, that we don’t take race seriously. But we do take race seriously because we want to negate it. We are blessed that our children are proud to be dogla.

In dogla discourse there was something special about being dogla, something to be proud of. Doglas were forthright with me about racist encounters – such as finding yourself unwelcome at family birthday parties because of ‘wrong’ race – and in such situations they felt outcast and hurt. Nevertheless, most doglas seemed to appreciate a status of non-assignment to a particular race. As Luke said, and as was echoed throughout dogla discourse in Nickerie:

³⁸ Clarence’s reference to Rawan and Dyasus: de Klerk (1998 [1952], 1998 [1953]) explained that in ‘the Vedic times’ dark skinned Dyasu people came to fight light-skinned Ariers in the Indus and Ganges area. In Nickerie the deity Rawan was referred to as “the black enemy” of the Hindu God Ram. See also LaGuerre (1974), who noted that in Trinidad “Indians associate Creoles with the black-skinned demon Rawan, the enemy of Rama in the Ramayana” (quoted in Birth 1997: 590).

The advantage of being dogla is that we do not belong to a race, with all its political restrictions and fussing over purity. Like politicians saying that people should vote for their own race. Like people not being allowed to marry other races. It is typically Surinamese, the race stuff (*het rassengedoe*). Doglas are no race because no two doglas are the same. A dogla is as different to a Maroon or Hindustani person as he or she is to another dogla. We cannot be grouped according to homeland, such as Africa, or India, not in terms of historical trajectories of becoming Surinamese, not in terms of typical dress or cuisine, not in terms of what we look like (*hoe we eruit zien*). Our looks (*uiterlijk*) are confusing. Dogla siblings often look completely different. Take your friend Riana who was waving to you at the bus stop. Her three sons are all dogla but one can pass as Amerindian, one as Creole, one as Hindustani – so they cannot be a race. Doglas only share a name, not looks. I look Chinese but I am also dogla. That is the race thing in Suriname.

Luke was a physician in Paramaribo and had been enjoying a holiday week with relatives in Nickerie. I spoke to him only on one occasion while seated next to him on the bus. His stress on the importance of “looks”, on “racial confusion”, was common in dogla discourse, explaining that because doglas were “no race” there was no dogla category in a Unity in Diversity framework.

More specifically, the lack of a dogla category was explained by saying that doglas who “looked Creole” (*er Creools uitzien*) could be “genetically related” (*genetisch verwant*) to people who “looked Hindustani” (*er Hindostaans uitzien*). In Suriname’s essentialist system of ethnic categorization – following the political logic of unity in diversity – Creole and Hindustani people were attributed with a racial purity not necessarily within their own groups, but, indeed, *in opposition to each other*.

The visual criteria upon which people were classified into an ethnic group could not, of course, be met in terms of what “racial” people actually looked like – but that did not seem to matter in dogla discourse. Dogla discourse stressed a dogla ambiguity marked by a discrepancy between random (but racialized) visual appearances whilst sharing “mixed genes” (*gemengde genen*). Furthermore, according to this racial logic people were portrayed as Creole or Hindustani (as “racial”) if they did *not* share each others genes (unlike doglas) and *therefore* could not look like each other. In other words, regardless of how mixed Creoles actually were both in terms of genes and looks, dogla discourse in Nickerie attributed a genetic and visual purity to Creoles in

contrasting them to Hindustanis. In the process, dogla discourse seemed to erase the colonial heritage of ‘creolisation’ as susceptible to mixtures between African slaves and white planters.

In the case of “pure races” (*pure rassen*), people in Nickerie reasoned, looks and genes did not present confusion, certainly not within one family, amongst siblings. Again, dogla discourse seemed to deny the colonial heritage of black-white mixture many Creoles certainly did claim. In families where Creole brothers and sisters did not look like each other – for example in terms of skin colour – they were nevertheless seen as looking “of the same race” (*hetzelfde ras*) because they did not look Hindustani. Doglas, by contrast, were said to confuse Suriname’s racial categories. This ‘confusion’ was aptly illustrated by Glenn’s twin brother, Wesley:

My body is covered by a sticker saying: This is a dogla: you know what that means! That sticker tells people that my identity is dogla, as predefined by the racial pollution of mixed descent. But in Nickerie we also say that doglas cannot have an ethnic identity because they don’t look the same, meaning that we do not belong to a race, that we are *not* predefined. So the sticker says dogla but nobody really knows what that means.

According to Wesley and Glenn, doglas were “no race” because they were mixed. Furthermore, the twins agreed that they differed in terms of looks. In logic similar to that presented by Vanessa and Armand above, they explained confusion about dogla bodies as resulting from contradictory ‘facts’ of genes and appearance. Glenn said: “I have a Creole body but Wes is a real dogla because he has dogla not just *in* but also *on* his body”.

The idea of a dogla sticker marking bodies of “real doglas” such as those of Wesley and Vanessa – or any racialized bodies for that matter – is, of course, a discursive one. I heard nobody (note the English word “no-body” implying an absence of physical persons) in Nickerie claim that because they were considered “no race”, doglas did not have a body in a material, phenomenological sense. But what dogla discourse demonstrated was that people expressed difficulties with locating dogla bodies in Suriname’s racialized categories of somatic distance.

England noted for the case of Trinidad that “despite the ability to see the arbitrary nature of [the racial] divide, [*douglas*] lived experiences represent the tensions that continue to exist along that divide” (2008:26). Douglas in Nickerie also tended to see the arbitrariness of racial categories with reference to their own “lived experiences”. Yet this did not prevent them from using racialized referents in their daily language. Indeed, in this social setting where racial boundaries were constantly stressed and reified, dogla discourse in Nickerie both affirmed and contested Suriname’s essentialized classification of races. My dogla friend Ella (see Chapter Four) had an apt understanding of this discursive ambiguity:

Douglas use the same form of communication as everybody else in Suriname. To make comprehensible what or who we are referring to we need clear categories of race otherwise our language makes no sense. But a word cannot fully describe someone. Our language is black and white, but reality is often grey, or purple, or rainbow. Life is not a matter of ‘this is me’ and ‘this is you’ and ‘this is it’. Of course it *is*, we *are*, but not as black and white as we think.

Ella’s contribution to dogla discourse was not unlike the dual discursive competence Gerd Baumann (1999) referred to. According to Ella, Suriname’s language of distinguishing people in terms of races, and doglas as mixed-race, needs clear categories to make sense. Dogla experiences of being lumped together as “of mixed descent” but distinguished on the basis of “ethnic” or “real” dogla looks, challenged race as a clear category.

From a more philosophical standpoint, dogla discourse in Nickerie bears analogy to Judith Butler’s work about *Bodies That Matter* (1993). In purposely contradictory (and explicitly feminist) style, Butler questions the existence of what she called “abject bodies” (bodies that do *not* “matter”), an existence that she herself affirms with her discussion of how we can or cannot understand “abject bodies” (Meijer and Prins 1998; Peterson 2006). Similarly, dogla discourse in Nickerie questioned race as clear category able to differentiate between ethnic groups and bodies; but affirmed this ability through an acknowledgement of doglas as mixed-race. In other words, the dogla category affirmed Suriname’s distinction between races, not unlike the way in which Butler’s ‘abject body’ category allows her to distinguish between “bodies that

matter” and “bodies that do not matter”. Below, I will concentrate on the discursive persistence of race in Nickerie (see the Theoretical Framework for a wider theoretical discussion of concepts of race and mixed-race).

Race and Mixed-Race Reification in Dogla Discourse

There are no demographic statistics of doglas. We have data about the category mixed, but that can be any mix. There are not more doglas than Hindustani in Nickerie, I know that almost for sure, but I suspect that there are not many real Creoles here, that there are more doglas than Creoles. You see, I am Creole but actually I am also dogla because my mother’s father is full-blooded (*volbloed*) Hindustani.³⁹ In the groups where people want to keep it pure, people from unmixed families, they repel us [doglas] a bit. But you can see that more people from pure families are mixing now, and I think that is good, very good, because that is actually our Suriname. I believe that within decades from now we will no longer have full-bloods, no real Hindustanis. At some point we have the potential to become an incredibly mixed population, in which people can no longer tell: ‘hey, who really is still real?’ (*ey, wie is nou echt nog echt?*)

Carmelita Ferreira, school teacher and politician

In Nickerie’s dogla discourse, race-thinking seemed to coincide with European epistemologies. It appeared as if Nickerians had not lost the nineteenth-century model of scientific racism imposed on them by European colonizers; they understood race as a matter of scientific fact, and therefore truth. According to Loraine van Tuyl, “[p]urists’ in Suriname still commonly believe in the racial determinism myth that cultural norms are biologically determined by racial genes and are ‘given away’ by racial appearance” (2001: 230). In Nickerie it was not only “purists” who believed in “racial genes”. Indeed, in its ambivalent challenge to “purists”, dogla discourse did not contest but continued a colonial language in which race was understood as a biological, genetic phenomenon of human difference. Indeed, as Sarah England has argued for the case of *douglas* in Trinidad, “while there are many ways that the dogla body pose[s] a challenge to essentialist biological ideologies of race, there are

³⁹ In translating racial terms such as *volbloed*, “full-blooded” here corresponds with Stoler’s use of this term (see Stoler 1992, 2009).

other ways that biology manages to slip back in, rearticulating race but not challenging its basic ontology” (2008: 4).

Whereas not all doglas in Nickerie eagerly referred to themselves as dogla, they did not seem troubled by a self-identification of mixed-race (*gemengd ras*), and were quick to point out if family members and friends were “race”. Yet doglas questioned racial categories as well. As quoted above, Carmelita Ferreira told me that “pure” people were increasingly “mixing” and diffusing the boundaries of who were “still real”. When visiting my Creole friend Pearl, her son Joshua explained doglas as questioning racial boundaries:

It is against others where our self-definition takes on a sort of magic truth. We know who we are, but it is much more important to think about who we do not want to be. Pure people guard their race, sometimes vehemently, and rarely negotiate the limitations of being pure. They are stuck in rules of purity, Hindustanis like my father’s family in particular. I have pure half-siblings, but I couldn’t care less that I am not pure, I am happier without purity, ha! Unlike them, doglas can question race. Take our skin colours: doglas can be totally black, yellow or white, and everything in between. There is no racial recipe for dogla skin, ha! What pure race people should realize is that life in Nickerie is not pure because we all live together, we are all Nickerian. Questioning race is something doglas more naturally do than people who are not mixed. As doglas we dispute the need to contra-identify ourselves against others, like pure races do.

Despite his argument against the importance of purity, doglas such as Joshua actually seemed to affirm racial categories in Nickerie. In *othering* “people who are not mixed”, or “pure race people”, doglas signalled the very contra-identification that was disputed. In other words, in Nickerie’s dogla discourse the category ‘mixed-race’ was reified no less than ‘race’ and, indeed, even strengthened the boundaries of what constituted “real races” against what was considered “not really ethnic”.

In racial, ethnic and cultural identity discourses it has been observed more widely that mixed peoples are often again contrasted against various groups of ‘non-mixed’ peoples (Bear 2001, 2007; Scheper-Hughes 1992). As Laura Bear (2001, 2007) observes in her fascinating ethnographic and archival studies of the documented and bodily identities of Anglo-Indian railway workers, Anglo-Indian “half-blood”

identity was a political and economic privilege during colonialism and a disadvantage during postcolonial identity politics; yet in both cases, Anglo-Indians were considered *other* than Anglos (British colonisers) and *other* than ‘pure’ Indians.

Whether it is doglas or Anglo-Indian railway workers, the objectification of mixed versus pure categories exposes the arbitrariness of fixing categories of being. If dogla as impure category is objectified in oppositional terms against what it is perceived *not to be* (pure), then it effectively contains a high level of categorical purity indeed because it is not a vague indefinite term. It refers to a category of people with parents attributed with particular, racially delineated referents. What, then, are we to make of a mix of purity and impurity? When do terms stop having categorical purity?

Are children of doglas more or less ‘pure’ than their parents? Of course, this question may do no more than simply suggest “new addition[s] to the already overloaded identity vocabulary the Caribbean restlessly (mis)juggles”, such as the term “half-dogla” (Rahim 2009: 12). Yet the answer to this question according to Nickerie’s dogla discourse presented an indication that both the biological and the visual were implicated when people explained the racialized dogla body. A strongly biological argument that relied on visibility in a terminology of “see” and “watch”, was provided by our local tennis trainer Dan Tjon Tjauw Liem (see Chapter Two):

Ethnicity depends on what you have inherited from your parents, so you are of full-blooded race (*volbloed ras*) if your parents are of full-blooded races. Dogla is a mix of two races. We cannot *see* the genes but we know that doglas have mixed genes because it is a biological fact. If you *watch* people carefully you will *see* it, although you may have doubts: is it a full-blood or is it a dogla? It can also be a mix of a dogla with a Creole for example, which makes it even harder to *see* that it is a dogla. Of course there will always be people who will not mix, but the percentage of doglas will probably rise, because *even if you marry back into your own race, then there will still be dogla in your children.* (my emphasis)

It was not clear to me what Dan was communicating with his last comment: if the “you” he spoke of referred to doglas, then what would be their “own race” to “marry back into”? On one of our last evenings at the Nickerie Tennis Club Dan clarified as follows:

If doglas marry doglas then you will probably see that they are real doglas.⁴⁰ Their bodies will tell you. If they marry into the pure race of one of their parents and their child again marries into that pure race then it might become harder to see that there is dogla in that family. But even if you cannot see it, the child's name might give it away or the genes of course, through the tracing of the family members. People can do genealogy (*genealogie doen*) to trace the history of the family and find the facts (*de feiten vinden*).

Dan was suggesting, then, that doglas could be identified genetically – not unlike (if we substituted 'dogla' for 'black') the 'one-drop-rule' principle in the USA, in which "people with 'one drop' of African blood in their veins are classifiable as black" regardless of their appearance (Wade 2004:157-8).

In dogla discourse in Nickerie, however, doglas were not only defined *biologically* on the bases of genes similar to the USA's one-drop-rule, but also *visually* on the basis of looks, as in Latin America (see also England 2008). That race is inherently a cultural category that can be embodied is illustrated by Peter Wade with the observation of a Miss America beauty queen who was classified as black in the USA whereas in Latin America "[she] was not even remotely classifiable as 'black'. She was olive skinned, with long flowing hair. Only in her facial features might Latin Americans detect a hint of African ancestry" (ibid. 157; see also Wade 1993).

As I showed earlier, the confusing co-existence of both biological and visual approaches to identifying racial mixed-ness in Suriname was the reason why doglas were not attributed a separate racial category. Although doglas were thought to share a similar mixed descent expressed in a terminology of family genes, they did not necessarily share what was seen as "real dogla" looks. If dogla bodies were identified on the basis of mixed descent, they could still not be racially categorized because "they don't look alike". Dogla discourse articulated a cultural assumption of bodily

⁴⁰ There are no statistics of the number of doglas in Suriname, nor of their marriage patterns. When I was in Nickerie I did not meet any doglas who referred to their spouse as dogla. This does not mean, however, that doglas only married – as Dan phrased it – "into the pure race of one of their parents." Rather, as I discussed in the Theoretical Framework, dogla is a descriptive term rather than a member of a collective group of people. As Segal (1993) pointed out, doglas do not form a racial category but are absorbed back into either the Indian or the African group.

sameness among people considered of “pure race”, both in biological and in visual terms.

As I have pointed out, then, in Nickerie’s dogla discourse, people objectified race as well as mixed-race as factual, reifying racial boundaries through an understanding of biological (genes) and visual (looks) substance. The terminology of mixed-ness itself indicated an assumption of parental pureness, endowing Creole and Hindustani people with pure racial properties. Whilst seeing the arbitrary nature of racial categories, doglas did not refrain from using that very terminology. Contrary to common theories of hybridity (see Introduction), the cultural discourse of race in Nickerie seemed to be self-referential, even self-embodied, *particularly* by doglas.

For all this objectification of racialized bodies as factual, below I will show how dogla discourse was also highly subjective or, indeed, *subjecting* the dogla body to arbitrary standards of appearance and behaviour. As Sarah England has also remarked with reference to doglas in Trinidad, “for most douglas [their racial] identity is constantly highlighted by people making assumptions about what [this] must mean about their character, aptitudes, tastes, cultural skills and even sexuality” (2010: 208).

In ambiguously countering the racialized narratives above, which present mixed descent as a biological matter, dogla discourse *also* acknowledged social ways in which family descent was established in Nickerie, with references to child adoption. As we will see, “real dogla” looks – and the looks of any racialized body for that matter – were not necessarily set at birth. Indeed, dogla discourse in Nickerie complicated its own distinction between “real dogla” and “racial” bodily aesthetics by contrasting children’s bodies with adolescent and young adult bodies in racialized terms. As I will show below, dogla discourse in Nickerie did not assign children “real dogla” looks. Dogla children were often attributed “dogla behaviour” (*dogla gedrag*) both at school and at home. However, “dogla behaviour” was not necessarily linked to being of mixed-descent, but was instead a more general referent people in Nickerie used for things that were “not working properly” (*het niet goed doen*).

The Subjected Dogla Body: Adoption, Appearance and Behaviour

In her discussion about the biological and religious descent-based family tree metaphor underlying anthropology's classic genealogical kinship diagrams, Mary Bouquet noted that "[t]rees gloss over the nature of the substance constituting the relations" (1996: 60; see also Schneider 1984; Barnard and Good 1984). Many doglas in Nickerie did not conceive of kinship strictly in biological terms, because of personal experiences of adoption, step-parenting and half-sibling-ship, but also of 'nurture' in the widest sense of growing up with social family relations. In this regard their understanding of kinship echoes Janet Carsten's fieldwork experience in a Malaysian village, where "the distinction between the biological and the social as fundamental to anthropological definitions of kinship ... [made] little sense" (1997: 27).

Despite an acknowledgement of the instability of genealogical categories of kinship, doglas found themselves part of a social setting in which ethnic groups' boundaries of inclusion and exclusion were constantly stressed and reified. As we have seen in this chapter, these ethnic boundaries found a strong expression in dogla discourse about race, which was not only understood in terms of genetic descent but also decided by looks. The case of Fanny illustrates both the limitations of conceiving of kinship exclusively in biological terms, and the importance of looks in definitions of the dogla body in Nickerie. Fanny was a young woman whom I befriended when she joined the English classes at the Volkshogeschool. She told me:

Doglas who are adopted by Javanese families, like me, we do not see ourselves as being different from our family; we are Javanese because that is how we are raised. But then when you get older, when you go to school and you go out, dancing and flirting (*als je gaat sporten*), that is when you realise that people do not see you as Javanese. That is when I became dogla, because my body is dogla.

It was common among Javanese families in Nickerie to adopt young children and babies. According to Fanny, this practice was partly influenced by the thought that

raising a young child enhances a couple's chances to conceive their own biological child. However, it also rested on the Surinamese-Javanese idea of *djadjji*-relations, of having extended family relations with people they, or their ancestors, shared difficult or otherwise important life experiences with, such as the ship journey from Java to Suriname. In Suriname, *djadjji* relations were most often traced back to relations created on the ship that brought them to Suriname, a shared heritage which called upon comradeship and a duty to help out so-called "*djadjji* relatives" when needed (see also Buddingh' 2012: 248).

Doglas raised in Javanese families often said that their adoptive family recognized *djadjji* relations via one of the dogla's parents. According to dogla discourse in Nickerie, in Hindustani families biological relatedness was very important. By contrast, Javanese families in Nickerie rather stressed social relatedness over biological ties in the sense that they easily raised adopted children as their own (see also Wekker 2006 for cases of adoption among Creoles). Conforming to what Fanny had told me before, Nick, a Javanese waiter in the town's popular Chinese restaurant Hong Kong, said:

In Javanese families, everyone adopts. Dogla adoptees usually say that they are Javanese because that is how they have been raised. But when they get older they get comments from outsiders because they look different. Doglas are beautiful people.

Nick and Fanny both said that despite identifying with their Javanese family, doglas were confronted with being identified as "not Javanese" when they were older. These judgements were based on their looks, even if in their overall demeanour they spoke and dressed, or 'were' Javanese. Nick also said, however:

Because of these comments, of people calling them dogla, or giving them the name of another race, like Hindustani or Creole, dogla adoptees often change their behaviour. They don't stop being Javanese, but people recognize their dogla behaviour, even if they look like a pure race. But dogla behaviour is not good; in Nickerie it is associated with instability.

In other words, not only were dogla bodies marked in terms of looks; in dogla discourse there were also assumptions about typical "dogla behaviour" that was "not

good”. Thus, the ambiguous biological/visual divide of dogla bodies was complicated further by assertions of how doglas in Nickerie were expected to behave because of their presumed “instability”.

In our third week in Nickerie, my recently made Creole friend Rike Esseboom took me cycling through the town and the polders around to introduce me to people. Rike was a teacher at one of Nieuw Nickerie’s primary schools and told me that she had many dogla pupils, such as Precilla. At the veranda of their family house, Precilla’s mother refuelled our water and sugar levels with an extremely sweet drink of Fernandes mixed with *stroop* (cordial). She said:

People recognize doglas because of what they look like, if their body shows it. If not then dogla will be recognized in their behaviour. Precilla has both the real dogla looks and the dogla behaviour, her brother only has the behaviour.

Rike countered this statement somewhat:

At school Precilla is actually fairly quiet for a dogla, almost shy, but you don’t see that very often. Normally dogla children are super wild and easily distracted. They are also very emotional and always feel as if they are attacked by other children whereas usually they are not, it is just paranoia. They are eager to pick a fight, for no apparent reasons, no real cause. Hindustani and Javanese children are quiet. Creole children are verbal and expressive, but nothing compared to doglas. Doglas are wild, boy!

Precilla giggled when her mother agreed with Rike that “yes, doglas are hot chilli peppers!”

Precilla’s case illustrates how in dogla discourse people’s actual behaviour (“Precilla is fairly quiet”), did not seem to affect the way their behaviour was expected (“you don’t see that very often”), and hence viewed (“doglas are wild”, “doglas are hot chilli peppers”). Looks were important in Nickerie to such an extent that – if they wanted to – doglas could not be or become ‘pure’ by acting pure because their social environment had already marked not only their bodies but also their behaviour with impurity. This seemingly deterministic and biologically reductionist view of dogla behaviour was contradicted however, or nuanced, in that dogla discourse *also*

explained the social environment as the reason that doglas were expected to behave “wild”. The case of Moen’s children is illustrative in this regard.

Following her midwifery training in Paramaribo, Moen lived in Groningen (in Saramacca district), moved with her husband and children to Coronie, and then eventually returned to Nickerie (see Figure 12, page 112). In her experience, the racial categorizations with which doglas were endowed differed according to location. In Groningen, her children were seen as “a bit of a mix of Javanese, Hindustani and Amerindian”. In Paramaribo they were “just mixed” (*gewoon gemengd*), without being called names. In Coronie they were dogla, “just dogla” (*gewoon dogla*). When they moved to the Henarpolder in Nickerie her children were called and treated as “Creole”:

They were not doglas there, but Creoles, which gave Hindustani kids an excuse to bully my children. Their parents allowed it, saying that my children were not like theirs, so they were bullying the Creole side of things. Henar is more Hindustani than Creole so the schools were mostly Hindustani. These kids knew that my children were mixed when they saw me, because I look Hindustani. In Nieuw Nickerie my children were also Creole; people called them negroes. They had a terrible time at school, with that awful racist bullying. My son is big. He has that strong Creole in his body, but he was also bigger than usual for his age whereas the children bullying him were skinny small Hindustanis. At some point he had had enough of all that racist booing and started to hit them. He is a really gentle boy but if he wants to hit people he will hit them very hard. So then they said that he was a typical dogla, that he was aggressive, that Creoles would never be as wild as that. So he was pushed into a dogla corner because of his behaviour whereas nobody queried the reason for his behaviour, the bullying. We should throw a bomb on that, the Hindustani bullying of doglas. It is not about Hinduism, it is about being Hindustani, because the Muslims are worse. This is what I grew up with, that strict orthodox Ahmadiyya nonsense. I am the eleventh of twelve children and grew up in that awful place called Paradijs on the road between Henar and Nieuw Nickerie. It was terrible for us at home if we did not behave like good Hindustani but even worse at school because we had been made so afraid of Creoles, being warned by our parents: “watch out, that negro is going to get you, he will harm you”. But Creoles did not harm us: we, as Hindustani children – and I deeply regret – harmed them. It is all because of the colonial mistake of putting different races in different locations. Of course nowadays Nickerie is more mixed. In the plantation time Nickerie was Creole, then with the rice industry it became Hindustani and now it is a little bit together, also with Javanese, so the dogla stigma and bullying has hopefully become less. Of course the bullying in Henar was also

because my children were not so young anymore, so more attention was paid to their appearance than when they were still toddling about in primary school.

Moen's story highlights several issues. She explained her son's "aggressive dogla behaviour" as a result of "racist bullying" by Hindustani children. This bullying behaviour was in turn motivated by Hindustani parents. Moen recalled her own traumatic childhood experience in which "good Hindustani" and "scary negro" were starkly caricatured. She further suggested that the way doglas were treated depended not only on individual appearances, or phenotypical features, but also on geographical location. The context-dependency of when and how reified racial boundaries were evoked and dissolved in dogla discourse, shows the multiplicity of 'being dogla'.

The relation between ethnic categories and their expression as seen in terms of the body, however, was further complicated by the various ways "dogla behaviour" was alluded to in Nickerie. Whereas doglas were often referred to as "particularly wild" – regardless of whether they were assigned "real dogla" looks or not – the discursive label "dogla behaviour" was used more widely for behaviour that was judged abnormal or inappropriate. It could refer to any child, or adult, but also to dogs, chickens, even to machines that were not working properly. Thus "dogla behaviour" was not only applied to persons because of racialized bodies or mixed descent, but was a designation of anyone and anything 'malfunctioning'.

What Moen also pointed out was that the valuation of dogla bodies was related to age. Like Fanny, several doglas I spoke with told me that they had been increasingly attributed with visible dogla characteristics the older they were. At school they were confronted with their presumably "wild" dogla behaviour. As I will discuss in the next section, despite the plethora of complex bodily changes occurring between young childhood and adulthood, the stereotypical valuation of dogla bodies in adolescence was invariably associated with racialized beauty. Furthermore – and despite the discursive confirmation of reified racial boundaries locating people's bodies in distinct racial categories – dogla discourse in Nickerie also expressed that

not only human bodies generally, but racialized bodies as well, can change, and sometimes *are* changed intentionally.

The dogla body obtained its racialized ‘visual purity’ when children moved into adolescence. Douglas told me that with the bodily changes that define and differentiate the sexes, their body obtained a status of ‘legal’ sexual activity. Bodily changes that turned children into adolescents were of course not uniquely dogla phenomena, but they were crucial for people’s definitions of which bodies qualified as “real dogla”.

Growing up was also a gendering phenomenon. Whereas boys-turning-men were assigned “real dogla” looks on the same “somatic” basis as girls-turning-women, bodily representation in beauty contests was only for young, unmarried women. Although male dogla bodies were frequently gossiped about for their attractiveness or sexiness, female dogla bodies were more explicitly mentioned in dogla discourse. Apart from beauty contests, commercial posters for market advertisements and also ‘looking-for-partner’ messages posted on television and newspapers invariably asked for dogla women. Like comparable, highly-popular events throughout South America (see de Casanova 2004 and others), I will show that Suriname’s Miss Elections were a particular arena where not only the female adolescent body was staged, but also where the notion of racial purity was both emphasized, and breached, most notably through the use of facial whitening creams.

Racialized Beauty and Bodily Change

Moen said to me:

What you really need to write in your dissertation is that the dogla mix of Hindustanis with Creoles results in the most beautiful Surinamese bodies. Doglas combine the best of the races! Of course, being beautiful can also be disadvantageous. People often have sexual fantasies about dogla bodies. But like my daughter knows first hand, it is nice to get compliments on your appearance, but far from nice to be associated with escort girls or with carnal randiness, to see your personality ignored simply because you look dogla.

Moen's point about race in relation to "sexual fantasies" is not a specifically Surinamese phenomenon. As Canessa pointed out, "it is very hard to imagine any situation in Latin America where race ... is *not* going to be a constitutive element in the construction of desire" (2012: 29).

The beauty of dogla bodies was not only – or not necessarily – limited to assessments of them as objects of lust, however. The breadth of assessments of dogla beauty can be illustrated by the role of doglas in Suriname's ethnic beauty contests, or Miss Elections (*Miss Verkiezingen*) as they were locally called. Indeed, it was particularly in beauty contests where dogla discourse in Nickerie seemed to find some of its most contradictory expression. If, as Moen said, doglas were associated with pollution partly because of what she called "their black ancestry", dogla girls were also amongst the most popular candidates in Miss Elections because they had an uncertain racial appearance, including the very "dogla curl" in the hair that signified 'pollution' (see below).

As much as this may seem a typical case of bodily objectification, however, some doglas also seemed *subjected* to it. Doglas did not speak against but, indeed, internalized the racialized and eroticized emphasis that people around them placed on their body. This was exemplified by Loretia, who had won the Creole beauty contest called Miss Alida a few years earlier:

Many people say that we are beautiful women, dogla women, because our hair has the wavy curl, you see. It is the curl of mixed race, the curl of impurity. Our body is polluted because we are mixed, and this is what attracts people. When I cry just because I feel like I just have to cry then I think: my God (*mi Gadu*), there is that emotional stuff of impurity again, the emotions that come with the beauty, with the sexual attractiveness.

Somewhat contradictorily, Loretia told me that she had won the Miss Alida contest despite it being an "ethnic election". She said that she had beaten "pure Creole" contestants through other requirements in which the winning Miss should excel, such as "dignity, independence, assertiveness, and educational achievements", which were all associated with "the modern emancipated Creole woman" (van der Pijl 2005: 125). According to Yvon van der Pijl (2005) and Jack Menke (2005), the many

ethnic Miss Elections in Suriname are not exclusively about bodily appearance. Indeed, as has been observed more widely in the literature on South American beauty pageants (e.g. see Rogers 1998; Schackt 2005), these contests – such as Suriname’s Miss Alida (Creole), Miss Hindustani, Miss Jawa, Sa Ndyuka (Maroon) and Miss Amazonica (Amerindian) – also function as public emancipatory platforms, as political spaces to gain ‘cultural’ recognition in a complex competitive context of postcolonial nation-building.

Loretia’s Javanese husband, however, was of the opinion that Loretia had won the Miss Alida elections not because she symbolised “modern Creoles”, but because of her “racially confusing” dogla appearance. To illustrate his point that Suriname’s Miss Elections were about bodily appearance rather than personal achievements, they both recalled that more recently a Hindustani girl had won the Miss Hindustani contest because of “her naturally light skin colour, without using facial whitening creams”.

The association of beauty pageants with ‘whiteness’ is not exclusive to Suriname. As Canessa notes for the case of Bolivia, “images of eroticized feminine physical beauty are overwhelmingly white. This is evidenced in images on billboards, magazines, and television advertisements as well as in beauty pageants, where Miss Bolivia is invariably white” (2012: 249). Canessa points out that Miss Bolivia, “represented in her ‘national dress’ ... resolves the paradox [of the desirability of] the body of a white woman with the accessibility of an indian woman” (ibid. 249-251).

People in Nickerie seemed very attentive to skin colour and hair type. With their reference to whiteness, Loretia and her husband touched upon the multiple tensions underlying the idea of ‘beauty’ in Suriname. Loretia, as she described herself, had “dark skin” (*donkere huid*). The Hindustani beauty pageant they referred to had “light skin” (*lichte huid*) and thus did not ‘need to’ lighten it. Unlike the direct link made between whiteness and eroticized beauty in Bolivia, which Canessa (Canessa 2007b, 2012) so eloquently explained, in Suriname whiteness was not necessarily associated with sexual attractiveness. Indeed, the flirting of Surinamese men with

white *bakra* students was not with the same intentions as their whistling to dogla women. Loretia's beauty was explained in terms of her ethnically ambiguous looks epitomizing "Surinamese-ness" – and also sexual attractiveness if not erotic fantasy. Whiteness was desirable for other reasons.

According to Laetitia Beek, the dean of the social science department of the Anton de Kom University in Paramaribo, physical features play a sensitive role in the Surinamese assessment of identities and in the qualities and values attributed to people: "Light and dark is always important here, particularly in terms of upward socio-economic mobilities", Beek said. "Light Hindustanis are often associated with Dutch nationals and sometimes even called *bakras*. Dark Hindustanis are invariably called Surinamese, whereas of course skin colour is totally unrelated to what passport they hold."

In this regard perhaps the popularity of chemical facial whitening creams among Hindustani but also Javanese and Chinese women in Nickerie, such as *Fair and Ageless*, does not come as a surprise. Wade points out that "Michael Jackson is perhaps an extreme example, but two of the techniques he has used, those of skin-lightening and hair-straightening, have been around for a long time and are widespread in the Americas and elsewhere" (2004: 167). Poole notes that amongst people in the Andes, techniques of "facial whitening [were] a commonly used tool to 'improve their race'" (1997: 207).

Lighter skin colours in Nickerie were not only linked to colonial hierarchies of upward mobility. Indeed, Sylvia Gooswit (2005) argues that Javanese women in Suriname were not concerned with the overall colour shade of their skin, but rather with incidental dark "weather stains" which the creams might help to fade. Furthermore, the influence of Bollywood films and the television industry more generally should not be underestimated in understanding the valuation of white skin amongst Hindustani people in Suriname (Gowricharn 2005; Menke 2005). Nevertheless, whether the preference of lighter over dark skin in Hindustani "somatic

norms” can be explained as a cultural matter or perhaps a media matter, it remains embedded in ruling power structures assigning value to skin colour (Marshall 2005).

What is interesting about the popularity of chemical whitening creams in Nickerie in the context of dogla discourse is that it signifies a belief that race, or phenotypical appearance, can change *even* in Suriname’s context of racialized fixities. If “pure races” in Nickerie could be so clearly distinguished in everyday language and looks through an objectification of racial content, defined by somatic norms and somatic distance, then where do the boundaries of one race end and those of another begin? What about bodily change? Whatever other effects they may have, chemical whitening creams promise phenotypical change. Furthermore, other bodily alterations such as changing one’s hair style have proven politically expressive, as I noted in Chapter Four with reference to the “hair politics” (Roland 2006) of *Wan Pipel* actress Diana Gangaram Panday.

With this in mind, let me return to Vanessa’s reflection on her tattooed body, with which I opened this chapter. She suggested that “real tattoos” would prevent people from seeing her “real dogla” body. Tattoos can be interpreted as a type of bodily change, given their relatively lasting imprint on the skin. Yet bodily change through tattoos does not necessarily imply *racial* change, even if race is understood to be phenotypically determined. In dogla discourse however, “real dogla” bodies inscribed with mixed racial appearance were associated with an ontological confusion of fixed racial categories of being. Tattoos could hide some of the confusion if it muffled skin colour. According to discursive dogla logic, any muffling of bodily features would take away some of the beauty of “real dogla” bodies. As Armand commented on his sister’s body, “what makes real doglas so beautiful [is] that you can see the mix of Suriname’s races”. What people in Nickerie referred to as “real doglas”, then, represents an extremely pure racial category because of its locally (‘culturally’) recognized phenotypical features, most notably “the wavy curl”.

In Chapter One, I noted how people in Nickerie talked about ethnic differences as typically Surinamese, noting that ethnic difference is what binds them together in a

unity of diversity. This emphasis on ethnic difference as symbol of nationhood seems to contradict suggestions that doglas were considered “true Surinamese” exactly because they were mixed. Yet people in Nickerie did not see this contradiction. They said that “in doglas the races come together”, but in order for them to come together “you need to see the racial differences” in the first place. Dogla mixed-ness indicates an assumption of parental pureness, endowing people with “real”, racial distinctions. Dogla assertions about their beautiful curl, about a sticker covering the body, and about tattoos hiding their “real dogla” body all exemplify the racialized engagement of doglas with their body, a simultaneously discursive and embodied experience of race.

Bodies and Beauty in Dogla Discourse:

Concluding Remarks

In their review of the literature on the social construction of race, Aliya Saperstein, Andrew Penner and Ryan Light asked:

Should [the concept of race] be limited to distinctions based solely on readily observable, physical characteristics, such as skin tone, hair texture, and facial features? Or is it the belief in inherited difference and an ideology of permanent inequality applied to an entire population of people that delineates race? (Saperstein et al. 2013: 362)

In Nickerie we have seen how dogla discourse articulates a concept of race which incorporates *both* biological and visual markers. Rather than positing genes and looks in terms of an either/or, dualistic definition of race – as suggested by the question of Saperstein, Penner and Light, quoted above – dogla discourse in Nickerie showed how the biological and the visual were understood to coincide for people marked with race, and were negotiated for people of mixed-race. Whereas dogla discourse portrayed race and mixed-race in genetic, overtly biologically reductionist terms, confusions about linking such reductionism to dogla looks showed how bodies were cultured in Nickerie, dependant on locally agreed somatic norms and deviations therefrom. Indeed, not only doglas but *everybody* in Nickerie had a ‘cultured body’ in the discourse of race and mixed-race. The centrality of the cultured body in dogla

discourse in Nickerie will be discussed more explicitly in the next chapter, in which I show how people's relation to spirits depended on their cultivation of 'spiritual embodiments'.

This chapter has shed a different light on people's perceptions of the body in Nickerie from Chapter Three. There, I wrote that the Nickerie hospital was a place providing people with a sense of a shared Nickerian identity which overarched ethnic differentiation because "all bodies can get sick and experience birth and death". When discussing differences and sameness among bodies, we know that bodies are of course more than simply racial embodiments. There is a rich literature on healthy and sick bodies, and there are various bodily differentiations between people marking gender and age. Encounters in the Nickerie hospital however, as crucial as they were for feelings of Nickerian-ness, and of communal belonging, were not the only encounters people in Nickerie experienced with reference to their bodies. As we have seen in this chapter, where people's concerns were circulated around personal subjectivities rather than shared endurances, dogla discourse represented doglas as anomalies in Nickerie's constructed fabric of racialized bodies.

One rationale offered in Nickerie's dogla discourse to explain why doglas could not be an ethnic group, was the phenotypical distinction people made between some dogla bodies as "real doglas", versus others as resembling "race" – despite a common label of "mixed-descent". Race was associated with visual sameness, whereas "doglas don't look alike". Being dogla was more than one phenomenon, because people collectively referred to as "dogla" were united in an interpretation of mixed descent but distinguished on the basis of looks. It was precisely because the "real" dogla body was so clearly recognized as beautiful in Nickerie that it acquired a phenomenological and discursive categorical purity that an absence of race would purportedly deny.

What I have further suggested in this chapter is that dogla discourse in Nickerie was not only a matter of race per se, but perhaps even more so of 'culture', or of cultivating bodily experiences. The next chapter extends this idea of the 'cultured

body' and the bodily non-belonging of doglas by looking at how experiences of spirit possession, death and afterlife were communicated in dogla discourse.

Chapter Six

“Ethnic Spirits” and Intra-Kin Rebirths: ‘Nourishing’ Cultured Bodies and Spirits in Dogla Discourse

In a ramshackle little house raised on poles, Bianca sat nestled into a couch with an enormous crate of garlic in her lap. Next to her were two more crates, one for the peeled garlic, the other for the peels. She was half-minding two children, who were playing on the veranda and stopped every now and then to help her peel the garlic. When I came in, she asked the children to give me a glass of *stroop* (cordial) and show me the toilet. During the hours that we talked she did not leave her seated position. I wondered if she could actually move well, given the considerable size of her body, which was covered loosely by an enormous cotton dress with colourful dots. While she joked that she rarely leaves her house because the stair leading up to the house would collapse under her weight, we heard a male voice calling her name: “Bianca, Bianca, come down, we have to go away!” Bianca raised her eyebrows in surprise. “That is my father”, she said. “Why is he yelling like that?” Impatient with Bianca’s reluctance to come out of the house, her father came running up the stairs:

You have to move out for a couple of weeks. That son of the Hindustani family across the road has committed suicide. They found him this morning. We don’t know what his spirit will be up to. We go to Aunt Betty in Paramaribo while the boy’s family is doing their purification rituals.

Bianca’s father, who introduced himself as “MacKintosh, I am Creole”, explained to me:

We better take care with the ethnic spirits (*etnische geesten*), for our own safety. Of course Hindustani spirits are different from *wintis* (Afro-Surinamese spirits), but in Nickerie people know that it is dangerous to ignore the precautions others take against potentially malevolent spirits. Even if they are not your own spirits (*je eigen geesten*) you might still be affected by them. Therefore I do not only take care with *wintis* but also try to avoid getting harmed by other ethnic spirits. Doglas like Bianca usually don’t worry about ethnic spirits because doglas are not really ethnic (*dogla’s zijn niet echt etnisch*). But I’m telling her, because she is my daughter, she needs to know about the ancestral spirits, and that things other than people have spirits as well, like the Kankantri, our sacred tree.

In the previous five chapters, I have shown how the making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries in Suriname's process of nation-building was negotiated in Nickerie's dogla discourse in historical, political and spatial contexts; and how ethnicity was both emphasized and denied in the domains of sexual and family relations, and racialized bodies. This final chapter concentrates on the relation between the dogla body and the spiritual world that surrounds it, by looking at spirit possession and death rituals. As we have seen in previous chapters, dogla discourse in Nickerie presented ethnicity ambiguously, both stressing and dismissing it. This ambiguity was expressed in people's relations to spirits as well.

The ethnographic content in this chapter is twofold: about spirit possession on the one hand, and about death rituals on the other. However, as I will show, these topics were integrated in dogla discourse. Firstly, dogla discourse attributed a spiritual immunity to doglas. Doglas told me that they could not be affected by *wintis* and Javanese spirits because ancestral spirits would get "confused" (*in de war*) by people of mixed descent. As I will show in this chapter, people in Nickerie spoke about spirits as so-called "ethnic spirits", saying that "the Javanese, they have their spirits, they are different from *wintis*, and there are also Hindustani spirits". In this way dogla discourse advanced an essentialist understanding of ethnicity by locating spirits in ethnic terms.

Dogla reflections on death rituals in which spirits of deceased were 'fed', or 'nourished', however, show that immunity to possession by ethnic spirits did not prevent doglas from spiritual experience per se. That doglas did relate to spiritual phenomena was particularly striking in their narratives of intra-kin rebirths, in which the spirit of a deceased relative was believed to re-enter the body of another relative. Dogla discourse in Nickerie thus seemed to present an ambiguity in which ethnicity was both invoked and denied in the relation of doglas to spirits. Some spirits were assigned an ethnic label; for other spirits, ethnicity was irrelevant.

Puzzled, I asked doglas why some spirits were ethnic and others were not, or how people differentiated between spirits in ethnic and non-ethnic terms. Doglas explained to me that it was about whether or not they “knew” (*kennen*) the spirit as a person they had encountered (*tegenkomen*) in life. Ethnic spirits were explained to be “spirits of ethnic ancestors” (*geesten van etnische voorouders*). Doglas said that they did not have “ethnic ancestors” because “doglas are not really ethnic”.

As I noted in Chapter One, historically created ethnic dividing lines made dogla an uncertain category of “No Nation”, a category that was denied access to a collective ethnic past. As we will see in this chapter, not being able to lay claim to “ethnic ancestors” also implied not “knowing” ancestral spirits, with some doglas even denying their existence. Spirits “known” to doglas, by contrast, were located in the immediate presence of the place and the people doglas knew in their lifetime. Doglas cared for spirits of deceased persons they had known, and they recognized death rituals involving a feeding of the spirits of deceased relatives as practiced widely throughout Nickerie, no matter whether the deceased were Hindustani, Creole, Javanese or, indeed, dogla. In fact, the existence of these spirits was not denied but literally nourished, or cultivated.

Below, I will first discuss how Nickerie’s dogla discourse described that it was unlikely for doglas to be possessed by spirits because they did not “know” or “recognize” them. Starting with the story of Patty’s cousin, we will see how Maroons and Javanese *could* recognize each other’s ethnic spirits. I will continue by showing how dogla discourse portrayed doglas as lacking the proper nourishment and spiritual embodiment necessary for spirit possession, while portraying culture as something people may have or choose and, similarly, nourish. I then turn to a dialogue between my dogla friend Agnes and her daughter in which they discuss their own relation to *wintis* and spirit possession, and the reasons that ethnic spirits find it hard to recognize dogla bodies. I will then turn to the sorts of spiritual embodiment doglas *did* ‘cultivate’, as expressed by their practices of death rituals and their understandings of intra-kin rebirths. I will conclude the chapter with a brief

review of the main argument regarding dogla relations to spirits, and how this chapter links to the overall thesis.

Patty's Cousin, the Power of *Winti*, and Dogla 'Immunity'

Patty's cousin was a Javanese man killed by a Maroon spirit. The man had a guardian angel, but an intestinal operation had weakened his body to such an extent that he was no longer protected from being taken by the spirit – which was sent by a man called Bigga. Patty's cousin had been killed by jealousy. During the English language class Patty wanted to tell us what had happened.

About two weeks ago my cousin Yaro died. He had problems going to the toilet. It isn't something he had for a week but he had it for years, because he had been working in the *binnenland* [Suriname's forested interior] and there you have many people from everywhere. Yaro was somebody who was very handy and helpful. The supervisors liked him and therefore he had more privileges than the others. It's all about jealousy. So one day he was working and got injured. He had pain in his belly and he went to the doctor. On a Wednesday he was operated on his intestines at the hospital in Nickerie and after that his condition became worse. The nurses of the hospital told the family to look 'outside'. Yaro's brother went to a Bonuman who was reading cards. The Bonuman told the brother that something bad was living with Yaro which wanted to take his soul away. When she was reading Yaro's cards she called the name Bigga. She told Yaro's brother that before the operation the evil spirit couldn't harm his little brother because he had a guardian angel. Now that Yaro had been weakened by the operation he was no longer protected against the spirit. Friday night the fifth of February, Yaro's father – who is my uncle – and another uncle sat beside his bed. Yaro grabbed his father's hand and began to talk, but it wasn't him who was talking, it was a spirit. The spirit talked with a different accent. The spirit came from the *binnenland*. The spirit told them that Bigga had sent him to take Yaro away and that Yaro would die before sunrise. Yaro was still holding his dad's hand and his uncle was praying beside the bed. The spirit laughed, saying that nobody can help Yaro, not even with prayers. The next day Yaro died at half past three in the morning. We don't have to be afraid of spirits but of persons, because they can harm you when they are jealous.

The woman who had been reading Yaro's cards was Uma Winter, an elderly Creole lady known for her herbal baths and medicinal advice inspired by her knowledge of *Winti*. She was called a Bonuman, a clairvoyant healer who could come into contact with spirits and suggest rituals to please them. In Nickerie, not only Creole but also

Hindustani and Javanese people visited Uma Winter. She was said to have healed people from all sorts of ailments, both physical and mental. Uma Winter told me that people not only came to her for personal healing, but also asked her to reach other people for them and treat them through the “higher powers” (*hogere krachten*) of *wintis*, either to bring them fortune or misfortune.

There is no clear agreement in the early literature on Suriname as to whether *Winti* is primarily an African legacy, or to what extent it has also been influenced by Amerindian beliefs about both visible and invisible persons/spirits that can bring ‘good’ or ‘evil’ and whose power can be facilitated or averted by *piai* (medicine men) (van Heckers 1923: 9; van Lier and de Goeje 1940). According to Alex van Stipriaan (1994), *Winti* is an animistic cult brought to Suriname by African slaves. Charles Wooding defined *Winti* as follows:

Winti is an Afroamerican religion which centres round the belief in personified supernatural beings, who take possession of a human being, eliminate his consciousness, after which they unfold the past, the present and the future, and are able to cause and cure diseases of a supernatural origin (1972: 551; 1979: 35).

Uma Winter told me something about *Winti*, however, that has not been mentioned by Wooding in his otherwise illuminating ethnographic work on *Winti* in Suriname (1972, 1979). Or perhaps Uma Winter did not tell me something about *Winti*, but rather something about dogla discourse in Nickerie. She said that through the spirits she can facilitate right or wrongdoing for anyone to anyone, but not always to doglas – “because they can be resistant”. I was told that some doglas were resistant to *wintis* and other ethnic spirits because of their mixed-descent, which made it unlikely for doglas to recognize ethnic spirits – and, in turn, for ethnic spirits to recognize dogla bodies.

According to Uma Winter, Bigga was a Maroon man who thought Yaro was receiving preferential treatment from their supervisors because he was Javanese, “of a different race” (*van een ander ras*). Unlike Uma Winter, Patty had said that her cousin had been receiving privileges because he was “handy and helpful”, not

because of race. When I asked them both about this they did not seem to understand my confusion, suggesting that I misinterpreted the issue. Whether it was because of Yaro's character or Javanese race did not seem important to them; where Patty and Uma Winter agreed was that Yaro had died because of jealousy, but also because he recognized the spirit sent by Bigga.

At risk of reading superfluous meaning into Yaro's death as they had narrated it, I probed them further about why the 'spiritual killing' of Patty's cousin would have been unlikely to have occurred had he been dogla. Could Bigga not have been jealous of doglas? How 'pure Javanese' did Yaro have to be so he could be affected by Bigga's jealousy? Patty agreed with Uma Winter's explanation that it had nothing to do with Bigga because anyone could be jealous of anyone or anything. They said, however, that Bigga's jealousy, if directed at a dogla, would have been unlikely to have such a devastating impact because many doglas would not recognize the power of the ethnic spirits.

Spirit possession can be interpreted as a transitional experience for the person, because it implies change, or a movement between bodies and spirits. Furthermore, as Mohkamsing-Den Boer and Zock note:

The preeminent criterion for determining whether an experience is transitional is whether communication about the experience is possible and whether it belongs to a *shared reality*, so that others can, to a certain extent, understand and get in touch with the experience. (2004:5, emphasis in original)

Uma Winter suggested that spirit possession was unlikely for doglas because they did not "understand and get in touch with the experience" to the extent Yaro and Bigga did. In saying that her cousin had been susceptible to possession by an ethnic spirit because he recognized the spirit, Patty was suggesting that a form of "shared reality", where ethnic spirits were recognizable, was necessary in the communication between Yaro and Bigga to have the effect it had. Doglas were not understood to be part of that "shared reality", because they did not know ethnic spirits and therefore would not be able to recognize them.

“Knowing” (*kennen*) and “recognizing” (*herkennen*) are closely related processes of learning. Their difference, however, was crucial in dogla discourse explaining why people who knew *their* ethnic spirits could recognize *other* ethnic spirits. “Knowing” was understood as an attitude towards those things people are familiar with, things they grow up with that are not experienced in single instances but are recurrent and gradually knowable. People “recognize” things with which they are *not* familiar, but that are sufficiently similar to things they “know” in the sense that they understand the *meaning* this unfamiliar thing is communicating. For recognition to occur, gaps in people’s actual knowledge of unfamiliar things do not need to be filled as long as the meaning is understood. Because Yaro knew the power of Javanese spirit possession, he recognized the Maroon spirit possessing him.

In portraying spirit possession as a matter of knowledge and recognition, dogla discourse seems to contradict common explanations of spirit possession as a phenomenon that powerfully overtakes human bodies. According to Janice Boddy, “[s]pirit possession commonly refers to the hold exerted over a human being by external forces or entities more powerful than she” (1994: 407). In Boddy’s explanation, spirit possession suggests a *separation* between body and spirit as different entities. This split was also suggested by Patty when she said “it was not Yaro who was speaking”. Boddy further noted that “*possession* ... is a broad term referring to *an integration* of spirit and matter” (1994: 407, emphasis is mine). In Nickerie’s dogla discourse, the relation between “spirit and matter” was not necessarily ambiguous to the extent of whether these were separate entities or integrated, but rather who or what was possessing what: the spirit, the body, the person, or the culture? Below, I will address this further with specific attention to how dogla discourse in Nickerie portrayed spirit possession as a form of embodiment.

The argument I advance in this chapter is that the reason doglas in Nickerie were unlikely to be affected by ethnic spirits was because they did not ‘cultivate’ a suitable body for spirit possession. In Nickerie’s dogla discourse, doglas did not

“recognize” possession by ancestral spirits – while being surrounded by people who did. I suggest that the relation between people and spirits in Nickerie is a cultural relation. Canessa presents a similar idea in his discussion of ‘indianness’ – or the emic distinction between *jaqi* (“people”) and *q’ara* (“someone bereft of essential culture”) – in Highland Bolivia (1998: 228). According to Canessa, in the definition of *jaqi* it is “crucial ... [to maintain] reciprocal relationships with each other and with the ancestral mountain spirits. ... The difference is that *q’ara* do not recognize [the spirits]” (ibid. 241). I suggest that in the case of Nickerie, doglas did not recognize ancestral spirits because they did not ‘nourish’ certain necessary cultural elements for possession to occur. As pointed out by people in Nickerie, doglas were unlikely to nourish a certain ‘spiritual embodiment’ because, with their label of mixed-descent, their culture was uncertain.

With ‘spiritual embodiment’ I refer to cultured bodies that are created in the experience of and engagement with the spiritual world that surrounds them. As we have seen in the previous two chapters, in Nickerie’s dogla discourse the dogla body was ‘cultured’ as anomaly – cultured as family stigma but also as attractive and desired. With my reference to spiritual embodiment here, I analytically distinguish ‘body’ from ‘embodiment’ following Thomas Csordas’ phenomenological explanation. Drawing on Roland Barthes’ distinction between “the work” (as physicality that can be stored on a shelf) and “the text” (that “is experienced as activity and production”), Csordas “juxtapose[s] the parallel figures of the ‘body’ as a biological, material entity and ‘embodiment’ as ... defined by perceptual experience and mode of presence and engagement in the world” (1994: 12). He argues that “cultural meaning is intrinsic to embodied experience on the existential level of being-in-the-world” and that “[the] starting point [of analysis] is a cultural phenomenology of embodied experience that allows us to question the difference between biology and culture, thereby transforming our understanding of both” (ibid. 270, 288).

Spirit Possession as a Form of Cultivated ‘Spiritual Embodiment’

According to Uma Winter, the difficulty with doglas in spirit possession was that they had “split bodies” (*gespleten lichamen*): “Doglas are not really ethnic. Their bodies are split between different cultures. If doglas are not raised with African culture (*Afrikaanse cultuur*), their body is not familiar with *wintis*”. She also said, however, that like many doglas, there were also some Creoles, especially “Euro-Surinamers”, who had lost contact with the spirits “because they neglect African culture”. She said that with doglas it was sometimes hard to tell whether they would be affected by spirits or not “because they all practice and believe different cultural things, so you don’t know for sure if their body has learned to recognize spirits or not”. In her position as well-respected Bonuman in Nickerie, she added that she had, at least, “with all my grey hairs of wisdom” never had doglas asking her for a cure against harm afflicted by ethnic spirits, which other Nickerians frequently came for.

Whereas academic concepts of culture, race and ethnicity tend to differ by definition, Uma Winter and other people in Nickerie seemed at times to conflate and at other times to distinguish between people’s “[racialized] body”, “[ethnic] descent” and “[cultural] practice and belief”. This overlapping use of terms exacerbated my difficulty in grasping how doglas and people of mainstream ethnic groups were perceived to differ from each other. Yaro had been ‘ethnically categorized’ by both Uma Winter and Patty as “a real Javanese, without mix”. I asked them if he had had *any* part of “African culture” in order to be affected by the Maroon spirit. “He had the belief”, Patty explained:

Like most Javanese people, Yaro understood Bigga and he recognized the intention of the spirit because he had grown up with Javanese spirits. He had learned about the spirits from his Javanese culture so he knew them. Therefore he could recognize the Maroon spirit. The Maroon spirit could possess Yaro’s body because ethnic spirits can possess any bodies that have learned to recognize spirits, also if they are bodies from another race.

The power of these spirits, then, came down to their recognizability. Recognition of spirits was cultivated during childhood, depending on whether someone had grown

up with them. In dogla discourse, the idea of what Uma Winter called “split bodies” was emphasized when people explained that “ethnic spirits have difficulty recognizing dogla bodies because of their mixed-descent”. The way people referred to “body” (*lichaam*) was in a biological, material sense. However, the relation between doglas and the spirit world around them was not about bodies alone, but also about a ‘cultivated knowledge’ of these spirits. Indeed, the ‘spiritual immunity’ of doglas against possession was not just about physiological bodies, nor just about culture, but both. It was, I argue, about a learned, nourished, spiritual embodiment that recognized spirit possession.

The complex relationship between ‘body’ and ‘spirit’ itself was highly ambiguous in dogla discourse in Nickerie. The classic Cartesian mind/body split that reduces the body to a ‘thing’ ruled by the mind follows the logic of René Descartes’ *Cogito Ergo Sum* (“I Think Therefore I Am”) (see Cottingham 1996). As we have seen most notably in Chapter Five, the dogla body was itself a powerful phenomenon ‘ruling’ people’s thoughts, and racialized classifications in particular. A body/mind or body/spirit ‘split’, however, was not altogether clear in Nickerie, as was apparent in dogla discourse regarding ethnic spirits.

That doglas were unlikely to be possessed by spirits because they had not grown up with them was confirmed to me by doglas themselves, such as Manuela. Manuela said that she was not scared by spiritual Javanese rituals such as *Jaran Kepang* (see below) because although her mother was Javanese she also had “the Creole culture” of her father “in her body”. References to *Winti* as part of “African culture”, “Creole culture” or “Maroon culture” seemed inconsistent in Nickerie, with people using these referents interchangeably. Whereas Uma Winter referred to it as “African culture”, Manuela related it to her father’s ethnic identification as “Creole”. When I asked Uma Winter about this she said “*Winti* is *Winti*, it came here with African ancestors, so it is both Maroon and Creole culture”.

But why was Manuela different from Yaro? Why did she not know or recognize both *wintis* and Javanese spirits? She said her parents had not practiced the rituals, they

had not taken her to *Jaran Kepang* or to *Winti-Pre* dances, telling her that these were not things “modern people” did. According to Manuela, her parents had raised her and her brother “as educated people, as people who speak Dutch and go to university and who do not have time for cultural beliefs”. The concept of modernity has been critiqued by anthropologists such as Bruno Latour (1993, 2010), not least because it assumes a move away from whatever is regarded as traditional. People in Nickerie often equated ‘being modern’ with ‘being educated’. They did not debunk cultural beliefs as ‘traditional’ but rather, like Manuela said, as something “educated people do not have time for”.

Western education, as a sign of ‘modernity’, was important not only to doglas in Nickerie but to people in Suriname more generally, particularly in relation to how they wanted to be identified as ‘a people’ of a Surinamese nation in relation to the wider world. It seemed very important, for instance, to note people’s educational titles in the newspapers and on the television, particularly if it was a journalist or politician who had been to university; and photographs of graduates filled the pages with congratulations not only from family and friends but also from “Suriname”. Of course, cultural beliefs in spirits may be conceived of as a form of education as well. In Nickerie spiritual beliefs were regarded as something people *learned* when growing up. But there was a difference between formal education and forms of cultural education one gets at home in terms of their relative value in Suriname’s wider process of nation-building.

Manuela’s parents ran a popular Javanese restaurant in Nickerie, serving not only Javanese but also Creole and European dishes, such as the Dutch *patatje oorlog* (literally “war chips”; deep fried potato chips served with mayonnaise, tomato ketchup and peanut sauce). She said that, “apart from speaking Javanese”, she had not learned much more about Javanese culture than other children that were going to school “where we are all taught about the cultures of Suriname”. As a result of Manuela’s parents not nourishing cultural beliefs in spirits, then, their children had not grown up “getting to know the spirits”. Having not got to know the spirits, they therefore felt unthreatened by them.

Dogla discourse regarding immunity against spirit possession however, was not put down to a lack of cultural nourishment alone, but also – as I noted earlier – to an insistent preoccupation with ‘ethnic bodies’. Not all doglas were excluded from a quasi-religious education in the spirits during childhood. Indeed, unlike Manuela, some doglas who had been adopted by Javanese families told me that their foster family had taken them to *Jaran Kepang* and told them about spirits. Fanny, for instance (see Chapter Five), had “grown up with the spirits”. When I asked her why she could not be possessed by ethnic spirits despite being cultivated into recognizing them, she said:

As a child I never experienced possession because for spirits children’s bodies are not the same as adult bodies, just like women’s bodies are not the same as men’s bodies. I have a dogla body now, so I chose not to believe in spirit possession. My Javanese family understands that, because if my body is not Javanese then my culture can change.

What Fanny suggested, then, was that “having a dogla body” could be a reason to “choose not to believe” the knowledge of spirits she had learned as a child. Nickerie’s dogla discourse thus confronts us with a social context in which the way people raise children mean that ‘ethnic bodies’ were created along with ‘ethnic cultures’. Doglas represented bodily anomalies that confirmed those ethnic lines of division. What Fanny suggested was that – as bodily anomaly – doglas did not necessarily rely on a culture that was given by family, but that could also be “changed”, or “chosen”. Because her body changed from childhood into ‘dogla-hood’, Fanny could also change her ‘cultural’ belief in spirit possession. This flexibility shows how dogla discourse in Nickerie ambiguously enmeshed dogla bodies and cultural identifications in a complex web in which doglas had a *choice* of spiritual embodiments. Below I pay attention to how such choices and nourishments of culture were expressed in Nickerie in terms of spiritual or religious beliefs.

Having Culture, Choosing Culture, Nourishing Culture

Doglas in Nickerie expressed flexibility if not uncertainty about “choosing culture”

(*een cultuur kiezen*). Among them was Kenneth Donk, a well-respected person in Nickerie. When we walked from the town to the shaded garden of his house he was greeted with polite nods by people passing us on the street. Examples of the impressive list of his activities were the many articles about Nickerie he wrote for the national newspaper *De Ware Tijd* (The True Time); his work as the director of the Bueno Bibaz secondary school in Nieuw Nickerie; and his membership to Desi Bouterse's party, the NDP (see Chapter Two). Every Sunday Kenneth led evangelical church meetings in Nickerie's former theatre at the Cultural Centre Nickerie (CCN). According to Kenneth, there was a difference between religion and culture according to some people and a conflation of these according to others. When I asked him what the ramifications of that diversity of thought might be for 'dogla culture' he said:

Doglas are born without religion and without culture. These are things we need to choose. Our religious choice might affect our culture, but only to a certain extent, and mostly if the religion is tied to an ethnic group such as Hinduism. Usually when people are Hindu they are Hindustani. Hindustani people tend to treat their religion *as* their culture. Most Afro-Surinamese see a contrast between religion and culture, so they can be Christian but *Winti* is their culture. I am a Christian, but I don't know my culture. One day I will be seated in the Kingdom of the Holy Spirit, but I do not believe in all these ethnic spirits and people's trances of being possessed by them. Perhaps my culture is simply being dogla, being Surinamese.

Kenneth's notion that doglas had a choice in religion and culture implicitly expressed the assumption that if you were *not* dogla you were born *with* religion and culture. This notion corresponds to Baumann's (1996) claim that the dominant societal discourse in multicultural states classifies people into essentialized cultures. As I noted in the Introduction, Baumann argued that what he termed the "demotic discourse" was "used to undermine the dominant one whenever Southallians, pursuing their aims as they see them, judge it useful in any one context" (ibid. 195). In Nickerie the presence of an essentializing dominant discourse and a demotic discourse that negotiated it seemed less clearly distinguished. Of course, ethnic essentialism was never far away in people's everyday life; but it was not necessarily dominant. Indeed, Nickerie's dominant discourse seemed to be 'dogla' in combining essentialism with a constant negotiation of culture, or cultural choice. The example

of Ruth's mother below illustrates how this element of choice, in the sense of choosing cultural attachment, conflates a distinction between dominant essentialism and demotic negotiation.

During one of our conversations in the airconditioned lobby of Nickerie's Residence Inn Hotel, Ruth Rudrasingh explained the importance of the Hindu cremation of a body as dependent on the deceased's "culture". As I wrote in Chapter Four, Ruth's childhood was marked by extreme poverty. Her Hindustani mother had been disowned by her parental relatives when Ruth was born, a dogla child of a Creole father. Two years before our conversation, Ruth's mother had died. This event was, as Ruth described, a "big drama", one which she still had not fully come to terms with: she and her sister could not provide a Christian burial for their mother because her body had disappeared from the mortuary of Nickerie's hospital. It later turned out that the staff at the mortuary had given the body to "legitimate Hindustani relatives" who then cremated her, and Ruth and her sister were never informed who these relatives were "for reasons of the hospital's confidentiality policy". With a mixture of sarcasm and tears Ruth added: "Isn't it ironic that the mortuary was entirely staffed by Hindustanis?"

Ruth and her sister had spent two years asking people throughout Nickerie if they knew anything about their mother's relatives. They talked to people working at the police office, the local council for birth, marriage and death registration, the Nickerian Commissariaat (local office of Suriname's governmental representatives), but also people at religious organizations including Hindu temples and at the big Hindu crematorium at Nickerie's Zeedijk. They even went door to door in Nickerie's Hindustani-dominated polders. Without any information about her mother's body, Ruth settled the case for herself with the following explanation:

It only makes sense when I try to understand the situation from the viewpoint of my mother's relatives. If it was them who claimed my mother's body, who claimed their daughter's body, then what did disowning her really mean to them? Why was her dead body more important to them than when she was alive? I believe it is because they had to do the Hindu rituals with her body. My mother always remained Hindu, she never converted to Christianity despite the recurring pain her relatives have put upon her and all of us. My

mother was scared to die without Hinduism. In a spiritual sense she remained faithful to Hindustani culture.

Ruth's question of what disowning meant to her mother's relatives is interesting. According to Ruth they had 'disowned' her in life, yet upon her death they claimed her body, hence effectively they sought to temporarily 're-own' it for cremation. I have not been able to verify whether Ruth's mother was indeed cremated and by whom. However, if she had been cremated by relatives it is not clear why it was imperative to them to take the body away from her daughters who were intending to give her a Christian burial. Some of my Hindustani neighbours suggested that perhaps whoever led the cremation process wanted to help the deceased woman to leave her body. Because Ruth and her sister loved their mother so much and their mother loved them, they reasoned, it would be difficult for their mother 'to go' (to disconnect spirit and body).

In Nickerie there seemed to be flexibility in a person's choice of religious dedication over a lifetime, but it was important to have one. Religious ceremonies played a crucial role during personal transitions in life, such as those around birth or at marriage, and at death. Furthermore, although many Nickerians had beliefs in God(s), most people also viewed religion as a practical necessity. As Ruth put it, "One cannot arrange a cremation without a pundit, no? You will have no funeral if you do not have a religion. My mother's religion was Hindu, not Christian; therefore we could not bury her. She has chosen not to meet me in the Christian heaven but to reincarnate."

What Ruth suggested was that the death rituals performed with the body of the deceased, as well as what happened to the spirit of the deceased, depended on how the person had nourished his or her religion. Like Ruth, many people in Nickerie suggested an apparent link between cultural rituals around death and what could happen in the afterlife. Ruth said that her mother had remained spiritually faithful to Hindustani culture so she could die as Hindu and reincarnate. Again, this explanation suggests the importance people in Nickerie seemed to attach to nourishing culture in relation to spiritual beliefs. Ruth's mother had nourished Hindustani culture, and had

therefore died according to the Hindustani ritual process of death and its associated spiritual beliefs. Thus a nourishment of Hindustani culture was decisive of whether people could actually reincarnate.

Whether someone was born with it or had grown up with it or not, then, culture was something that had to be nourished in the sense of giving it meaningful attention and dedication. Such nourishment gave people's cultural beliefs – including about spirit possession – certainty. Doglas, by contrast, were not seen as having cultural certainty because, as Kenneth had said, to doglas culture contained an element of choice (though this did not mean, as I will argue later in this chapter, that doglas could not nourish the culture they chose). Likewise, Uma Winter's suggestion above that the relation between doglas and spirits came down to their "practice and belief" also implied a choice, or at least a certain cultural flexibility in people's relationships to spirits. As I will show with the dialogue of Agnes and Natascha below, however, despite the suggestion of flexibility in doglas' nourishment of culture – including their agency in spirit possession – dogla discourse limited ethnic spirits with a surprising *inflexibility* or lack of agency in whether they could recognize doglas or not.

Recognizing the Dogla Body

Agnes Ramjiawan was working as taxi driver for the Nickerie hospital. The first time I saw her was when she came to our house to give me her business card, saying that I should call her if I needed to go somewhere with my baby daughter Yasmin Rhea. From that day I saw Agnes frequently. Before the first time I saw her, I had actually already heard her voice over the phone in the very early hours of the morning, when I phoned the Nickerie hospital. After my waters had broken that night, the contractions started to get excruciatingly painful. I had no experience of how to 'do' delivering a baby, and had called the hospital. Hospital staff had connected me to Agnes's mobile number, but as she happened to be in Paramaribo she said she would send her husband to pick me up and drive me to the hospital. He was a tall Creole man with an enormously warming and welcoming demeanour that immediately put me at ease.

Agnes and her family became invaluable to me and my family during our time in Nickerie.

During a mosquito-inhabited evening in my family's courtyard, an intriguing dialogue developed between Agnes and her daughter Natascha Greenwood, who was a teacher at a school for children with physical and/or mental impairments, and was also a part-time student. It all started with my naïve question: "What is a *bakru*? Some people here have told me that it is a dwarf-like figure with his feet turned the wrong way around who has bad intentions unless he gets pleased by people giving him beer, jewellery and singing spells."

Agnes: I have never seen a *bakru*. It is something people have remembered from Africa.

Natascha: It has something to do with *Winti*. Every person has a spirit, a protection, an I (*een ik*). Sometimes, when you feel sad and you don't know what you want, then this spirit will tell you what you have to do, will help you, and that help will be aided by the music, by the drum, during the *Winti-Pre*. It is just a dance, the *Winti-Pre*. The drum is more important. When people hear the music over the radio they can also get the healing of that spirit, so you don't have to go to a Bonuman, you can just organize the dance yourself. But because we are those doglas (*omdat wij die dogla's zijn*) we cannot see that spirit. We are bastard people they say, right? We do not have a whole race (*heel ras*) like that Maroon or those Javanese. We are not only Creole or only Hindustani but mixed. It is people who have real races (*mensen die echte rassen bezitten*) who have *wintis*, like the Maroon. But look, we also do not have time for these things because we are busy, so it is not just because we are *moksi moksi* (mixed).

Agnes: I have never heard of a dogla having a *winti*, no matter if they are busy or not.

Natascha: But perhaps with that music a dogla might get into a trance? At the *Winti-Pre* people go into a trance. The drum is like the dragon head of the Chinese, and the Javanese also have something like a dragon head. That head is important because it does something like a *winti*, the spirit is in that dragon head.

Agnes: That head is just wood, Natascha.

Natascha: Yes it is wood, but is treated, stimulated. If they put that dragon head on the head of a person then he becomes that spirit. They dance and they light a fire which the dragon blows out. After that the dragon head is put onto

a chair and then it does not mean anything anymore. But there has never been a *Jaran Kepang* without that head and never a *Winti-Pre* without that drum.

Agnes: Well, not for me, not for doglas. Doglas just go dancing for a bit and then they go home. To us it is just music like other music. Dogla is like a hammock, a hammock does not hang stable enough for any spirit to come to you. *Wintis* get confused by mixed bodies. They don't understand the Hindustani part of our body, just like Hindustani people don't understand our African ancestry.

Natascha: But what if a *winti* of your African ancestors happens to be in your Hindustani neighbourhood, and then maybe he might recognize you, in your body, because he recognizes the African among all those Hindustani bodies?

Agnes: Then he will come to you. But *wintis* don't just go into neighbourhoods. They come with the drum, and the chances of him recognizing you during a dance is very small, because of the Hindustani in your body.

Natascha: It is important that your body is strong, your I, that I of yours, that self confidence. We build our I through our self confidence and our body should not be weakened by a lack of self confidence, because even though that spirit is in doubt, because we are dogla, he could break us if our body is not strong enough. It really depends on how strong you are.

Agnes: It also depends on what you believe, if you believe that *winti* to exist.

Natascha: Yes, when you believe then you hide yourself in that *winti*. When people say "I believe in that *winti*" then they are hiding from themselves.

Iris: Do you believe in *wintis*?

Natascha: No.

Agnes: I have never heard of a dogla with a *winti*.

Natascha: Never. Other people have that easily, when they go into a trance. When doglas think they might get that trance feeling they leave.

Agnes: I cannot help laughing when I watch people doing their trance things.

Natascha: Some people want to push it onto you. They come very close and when you say that you are leaving they take the music right into your ear and say "ah... you are leaving?" and then we leave. So it depends on what you want to do: are you letting the spirit in or do you leave him out. At the *Winti-Pre* you don't feel very well; you become unstable because of the music. Even if I have not eaten anything at that party, I leave before the trance.

Agnes: I believe that doglas don't need to worry about trance, about spirits.

This conversation I had with Agnes and Natascha highlights several things about how doglas saw their relation to ethnic spirits. Agnes and Natascha did not seem to agree on the extent to which doglas might be affected by spiritual trance. They had different ideas about the agency (power to act) or choice doglas may have over their relationship to the spirit world that surrounds them. Both Agnes and Natascha however suggested a form of confusion on the part of *wintis* because of “the mixed body” of doglas. In other words, in dogla discourse spirit possession was explained as dependent not only on whether a person recognized a spirit, but also whether a spirit recognized a *body* (whether a body was able to be possessed).

The mutual recognition, or knowing of people's ancestral spirits, then, was not only something that was *learned*, as was implied above with the case of Patty's cousin. It was also something that explicitly categorized spirits and bodies in ethnic, if not racial terms. There was a taken-for-grantedness of essentialism in people's accounts of culture, spirits and bodies that contrasted dogla bodies with spirits that sought out ‘pure’ cultured bodies. This taken-for-grantedness seemed an intrinsic part of why dogla discourse was not able to overcome Suriname's historical classification of people in ethnic terms. Indeed, whether doglas believed in *wintis* or not, their explanations of spirit possession did not problematize the perhaps strongest belief in Nickerie: that something like ‘ethnic purity’ existed, and that stereotypical identifications of people in Nickerie equating bodies with “ethnic descent” were valid.

However, dogla conversations – like the one between Agnes and Natascha, as mother and daughter – were also processes of learning, negotiating how to deal with the obvious presence of spirits and their recognition. What doglas seemed to do was perhaps not a practice of knowing or recognizing ethnic spirits; but dogla discourse nevertheless pursued knowledge about other people's behaviour in relation to spirits, most notably when commenting upon trance dances such as *Winti-Pre* and *Jaran Kepang*. Whether it was because doglas were not “raised with spirits”, because they did not feel actively motivated (or invited) to take part in such events, or because

they had chosen not to believe in spirit possession, doglas were nevertheless trying to make sense of what was actually happening during these dances. Furthermore, as I will show below, dogla beliefs of transcendence and their engagements with cultural death rituals – including the feeding of a deceased’s spirit – indicate that the ethnically exclusionary ideas of spirit possession in dogla discourse did not prevent doglas from nourishing spiritual embodiments that were not ethnic per se.

***Jaran Kepang* and Transcendent Beliefs among Doglas**

In the last few months of my fieldwork in Nickerie, Wesley and his twin brother Glenn (see Chapter Five) took me to watch a fascinating *Jaran Kepang* dance by possessed Javanese men. During the ritual the men ‘turned into’ horses galloping through the sand, eating *padi* (uncooked rice) and grass. As the dance continued, some of the men seemed to move into other animal manifestations, plucking feathers of chicks with their teeth and eating them raw, and in one man’s case tearing open a coconut with his bare teeth like a monkey. Wesley said:

Most people view doglas in terms of our mixed body, simply because of the way we look. But it is not just about bodies but also about culture. Javanese spirits are part of their culture, so if as a dogla you do not know their spirits then they cannot come to you, they cannot affect your body. Some people don’t like going to these trance rituals because they are afraid that their body might be affected by the dance and the drum. Everyone can come to see these dances; that is what cultural integration means in Suriname. We can learn to understand why people have their cultural trance dances. They are all teachers, these spirits, they tell people about morality, about their culture. Hindustani spirits are teachers to Hindustani people as much as Amerindian spirits are teachers to Amerindians. *Wintis* are teachers for Creoles and Maroons. Ethnic spirits are really important to these people, otherwise they would not be walking over glass splinters like they do in Santigrón. If you want to learn something about Nigerian spirits you might as well talk to people in Santigrón. *Jaran Kepang* might look like a weird dance to us, but to Javanese people it is full of spiritual meaning. They say the trance allows communication between the worldly and the transcendent.

Speaking of spirits as teachers, who “tell people about morality, about their culture”, Wesley saw communication between these “teachers” and “people” as one “between the worldly and the transcendent”. When doglas in Nickerie spoke about the worldly

and the transcendent, they usually referred to their body as wordly and to spirits as transcendent. In these conversations, doglas expressed spiritual beliefs that were not tied to a nourishing of culture of the sort Uma Winter judged necessary for contact with ethnic spirits. In their explanations of the transcendent, doglas often made reference to death, or what happened to a person upon death. Although my discussion above has been concerned with spiritual beliefs and practices in life, doglas were also, of course, confronted with questions of death, the death of a body, and what would happen to the “spirit” (*geest*) of a deceased person. Many doglas, even those staunchly claiming to be “modern” or “educated” and “therefore unaffected by spirits”, joined cultural rituals upon a person’s death. These rituals, they said, were needed to please the spirit of the deceased and to help the process of transcendence.

In the neighbourhood where I lived, in the midst of Hindus and their belief in the reincarnation of a person’s spirit, not all doglas readily accepted a reincarnation-focused Hindu variant of the relation between bodies and spirits. My neighbour Diana did not believe in reincarnation. She had liver cancer and an advanced stage of *struma* (goitre), and was small and very thin. She said she felt she was going to die soon. Her mother was Hindu and her father Muslim, but Diana and her siblings were educated by Christians, who also took them to their church. Having married a Hindustani man, Diana had a Hindu wedding and raised her two children as Hindus. She prayed to the Gods in a corner of the garden, at a shrine next to the red, yellow and white *jhandis*, the prayer flags on long wooden sticks (see Figure 21).

Diana’s mother told me that when Diana dies her Hindu relatives will organize a religious service for her. They will put food in every corner, which Diana’s spirit will then come to eat during the first night following her death. The next day they will look at the place in the garden where they put her ashes to see which footprint has been left in the ashes. That way they know in what shape she will return. “So if a dog accidentally steps into my ashes then I am believed to have reincarnated as a dog”, Diana laughed. “No, I don’t believe that. When I die I’m simply dead, that’s all.”

Figure 21: *Jhandis* in Nickerie



Photo taken by Stuart

Whereas Diana rejected the thought of reincarnating as a dog, however, she did say that the reincarnation of a person's spirit could occur, but within close family ties. "Orthodox Hindus untie (*losmaken*) the spirit from the family, letting it float to any indeterminate body, even to that of dogs", she sneered. She said that in Nickerie many families, however, had encountered cases of intra-kin rebirth, in which the spirit of a deceased member of the family entered the body of a newborn relative. This was a spiritual experience that was narrated not exclusively but, nevertheless, *also* by doglas. As I will illustrate with the case of Loretia's brother/daughter,

accounts of intra-kin rebirths described a different experience from the Hindustani belief of reincarnation, most notably in the relation of the spirit to family ties. Douglas did not associate intra-kin rebirths with a concept of karma, or a person's conduct during life, nor did they view the deceased as breaking away from the family. Rather, they associated intra-kin rebirths with a strengthening of family ties.

The Intra-Kin Rebirth of Loretia's Brother/Daughter

Loretia George lived with her baby daughter, her Javanese husband and her Guyanese mother in a ramshackle little wooden house behind the local swimming pool. Her mother was Hindu but converted to Christianity when she married. When they were younger, Loretia and her brother went to the Moravian Vredeskerk (Church of Peace) in the town centre because their Creole father was a preacher at that church. When she met her Muslim husband, Loretia chose to dedicate herself to the Koran. Her Islamic commitment, however, did not seem to conflict with some of her beliefs elsewhere, such as the return of her brother's soul.

Loretia's brother died when he was twenty-four. He was accorded a Creole funeral. First, his relatives held a *dede oso*, a wake at home, and the day before his burial they held the *singi neti*, a night in which they sing and preach almost constantly until the morning. During the days of mourning, before the *singi neti*, his relatives only ate dry bread; but on the day of the burial, after the *singi neti*, they ate delicious food which friends and other guests had cooked and brought to the house, such as *heri heri* (a spicy mix of sweet potato with cassava and boiled banana) with meat or salted *bakkeljauw* (a white fish), *nasi goreng* (Javanese-style fried rice), *pom* (Creole dish of pom tayer and chicken), *moksi alesi* (Creole-style mixed rice, often with brown beans and shrimps) and the traditional Creole peanut soup.

During the burial ceremony they sprinkled pure Floridawater over her brother's body, which is water in a long-necked glass bottle with a pleasant scent, and often used by the *bonuman* for preparing the medicinal herbal baths. They then put nice clothes in the coffin for him to wear, as well as various things he specifically liked,

such as cigarettes. Loretia told me:

My brother loved cigarettes. But we could not put a match or a lighter in his coffin because if he sees that, he will stand up at night, and that is dangerous because that would have forever prevented his body to rest. Giving people an earthly light prevents them from going to the light of the afterlife.

Another church service was held eight days after the funeral, called *aiti de* (eight days). At that service everyone cooked her brother's favourite dish, which was *pom*, and celebrated that he could eat his favourite dish together with his relatives and friends, one last time.

As is clear from Loretia's account above, these death rituals seemed to tie a lot of significance to food. Death rituals in which the spirit of the deceased is 'fed' solid foods and given material presents are, of course, not unique to the burial of Loretia's brother, nor even to Nickerie or Suriname. In Suriname, Hindu cremations and Afro-Surinamese burials signify different understandings of the relation between spirit and matter. Yet rituals preceding the disposal of the body seemed remarkably similar across all ethnic groups when it concerned the preparation of food for the spirit of the deceased. Loretia's description of the practices around her brother's death corresponds to descriptions of "Afro-Surinamese" death rituals in the literature (see van der Pijl 2007; van Lier and de Goeje 1940).

Furthermore, as I noted above, Diana's Hindu relatives also talked about "putting food in every corner, which Diana's spirit will then come to eat". Likewise, the Javanese death rituals Patty's family undertook for her cousin Yaro (see above) also included the preparation of food for his spirit. Patty herself explained that "after the operation Yaro had not been able to eat so he would be hungry now that he no longer has the intestinal problem". In other words, feeding the deceased was not an ethnic phenomenon, but a commonality of death rituals in Nickerie.

Again, the relation between spirit and matter was not straightforward in dogla discourse. These practices of 'feeding the deceased' were based on the idea that the spirit would enjoy the transcendental qualities of the material offer. Several people in

Nickerie said that many things had both tangible and intangible properties, like Bianca's father MacKintosh I opened the chapter with, commenting on the Kankantri.

During the *aiti de* service of Loretia's brother, the women cooked the *pom* and gave the men a portion each. They then buried part of their portion in a hole dug in the ground, deep in the earth so dogs could not reach it. Following *aiti de* it was said that Loretia's brother was ready to finally rest; that his soul no longer had to visit the people he left behind. Yet, according to Loretia, her brother's soul did not reach this stage:

We believe in dreams. We say that my daughter... I married and got pregnant just before my brother died. My parents dreamed about houses getting built so they knew that something new would be coming and they also dreamed about boats on a river, which means that someone is dying. This is why my daughter looks like my brother and why they behave similarly. My daughter was also born with a hole in her right ear; when my brother died he was wearing a golden earring in his right ear. Normally that is not allowed, but we saw it at the cemetery so perhaps they did not pay attention when they washed his body. So my daughter is my brother.

Loretia's story seemed odd amongst the fairly mundane accounts of other doglas I spoke to. However, it was not an exceptional case. Other doglas acknowledged the occurrence of such rebirths in Nickerie, with some people even telling me that "these things happen quite often". What Loretia talked about is not unknown in the literature either, but resembles what Rebecca Empson has referred to as "intra-kin rebirths" (2008: 73). With reference to Buddhist reincarnations, or rebirths, Empson observed that:

At death, when a person's body is still warm, people place an ink mark on their bodies. The deceased person's soul is then said to travel for forty-nine days while it finds a new body to inhabit. When the soul has chosen to inhabit a new body, the deceased person's ink markings reappear on that person's body, in the form of a birthmark. ... As a young child starts to speak and move about in the world, certain characteristics, stories of extraordinary experiences, idiosyncratic mannerisms, turns of phrase, and physical characteristics become recognizable to kin members as indicators of rebirth (ibid. 70).

Whereas on the one hand dogla discourse portrayed doglas as unlikely to be possessed by ethnic spirits because of uncertainty around their cultural choice, or the culture they had nourished, dogla discourse also showed that many doglas did nourish a form of spiritual embodiment that was not bound to ethnically exclusive terms. Their spiritual embodiment was further illustrated by their accounts of intra-kin rebirths. Though doglas were unlikely to be affected by spirit possession because they had not grown up with a culture teaching or familiarizing them with ethnic spirits – or they chose not to nourish that culture – dogla beliefs in intra-kin rebirths showed that spirituality (as a belief in the existence of immaterial things) in Nickerie was not in all respects divided into ethnic categories excluding doglas. Indeed, intra-kin rebirths like the one described above were communal forms of ‘spiritual embodiment’ that were also nourished by doglas.

Loretia’s experience did not, of course, simply ‘fall upon her’; quite on the contrary. It was a multi-culturally influenced, perhaps syncretized account of how people in Nickerie were coming to terms with ideas of life after death, of what happened to the spirit of a deceased relative, loved one, or, indeed, any person they had “known”. Whereas ideas of intra-kin rebirth in dogla discourse partly engaged with Hindu ideas of death and reincarnation, they were also related to the Afro-Surinamese idea of *ninseki*. Loretia herself denied explicit “ancestral links” to Afro-Surinamese culture. Nevertheless, some of her explanation of her intra-kin rebirth experience resonates with van Lier and de Goeje’s (1940) description of *ninseki*, or “reincarnation”, among Ndjuka Maroons:

The *ninseki* [namesake] of the person is that which reincarnates. ... [People recognize the *ninseki*] through a sign. For example, if you had cut yourself then you will see the scar on the child. Who will enter the child is revealed during the pregnancy to the father or the mother, who dreams this person. ... When someone dies, the spirit wanders around and after one or two years will enter a newborn child and will stay there during the entire life of this new person. The City Negroes [*Stadsnegers*: Creole] also believe this. ... A human spirit never enters an animal. ... All humans have lived before, but never as animals. All Negroes, City Negroes as well as Bush Negroes [*Boschnegers*: Maroon] believe in this reincarnation. ... It happens that a child is born and people recognize by means of the mark whether it is a father, cousin or aunt is who is reborn. Some people make a hole in the ear of a deceased child, as mark. Only a family member can be reborn in this way.

If it is not this kind of reincarnation then people reckon that the person comes out of God (van Lier & de Goeje 1940: 172-174).

Whereas Loretia and other doglas telling me about intra-kin rebirths made no specific reference to Afro-Surinamese ideas of *ninseki*, parallels between her story and van Lier's description above are obvious. Of course, the question arises why doglas could not experience ethnic spirit possession if they did nourish aspects of Afro-Surinamese and Hindu beliefs. If, as Uma Winter and others had suggested, doglas were unlikely to recognize ethnic spirits, then why would they recognize intra-kin rebirths? Was it because they only knew certain *aspects of* ethnic spirits and therefore did not recognize others? Doglas shared the idea of kin spirits with Afro-Surinamese *ninseki*, but *ninseki* is only one of many ancestral spirits among the Afro-Surinamese (see van Lier and de Goeje 1940; Wooding 1972, 1979), of which doglas had no knowledge.

Cultivating Spiritual Embodiments: Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have argued that the ambiguity in dogla discourse regarding the relation between doglas and the spiritual world that surrounds them, can be explained by the way people in Nickerie cultivated 'spiritual embodiment'. Spiritual experiences were possible for people who practiced and believed in ritual interactions between the worldly and the transcendent. That doglas were unlikely to be possessed by what people in Nickerie referred to as "ethnic spirits", either came down to a lack of knowledge, or to insufficient nourishment of a certain spiritual embodiment necessary for spirit possession to occur. That doglas did have other transcendental experiences such as intra-kin rebirths, was equally a function of nourishing other forms of spiritual embodiment they had encountered in Nickerie.

As I explained in this chapter, without such a cultivation of spiritual embodiment, doglas could not "recognize" nor be "recognized" by spirits. Dogla discourse in Nickerie assigned doglas immunity against spirit possession because ethnic spirits were linked to a particular form of spiritual embodiment that allowed possession. However, whilst they did not engage with these ethnic spirits, doglas *did* nourish or

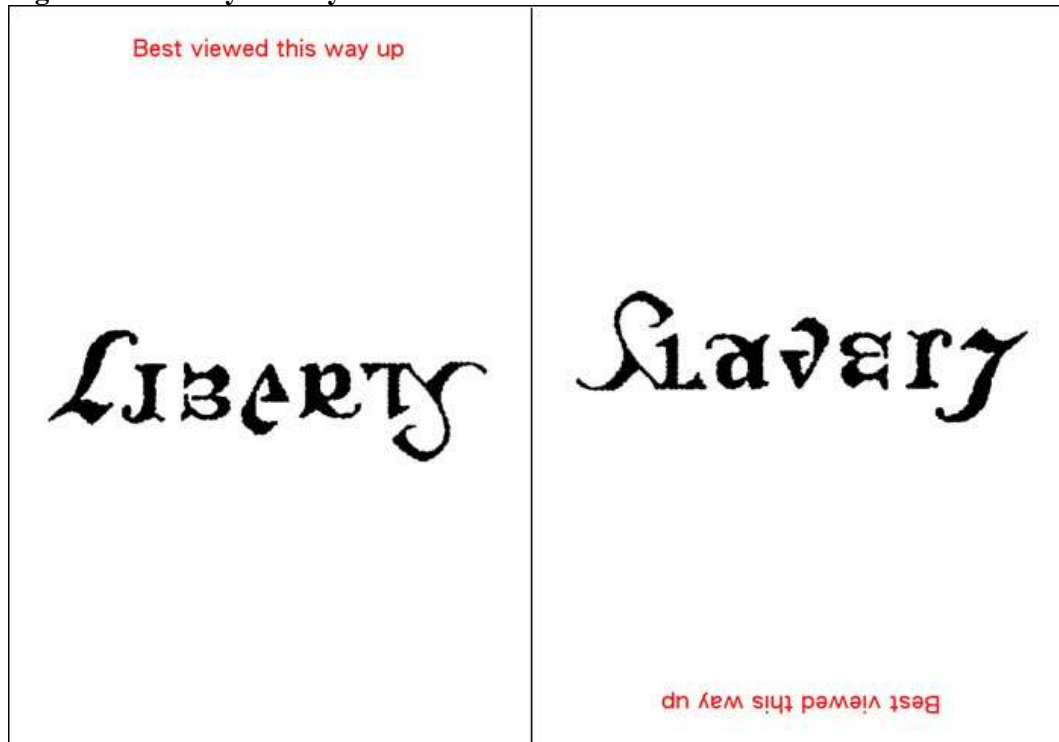
cultivate other forms of spiritual embodiment – particularly in death rituals, and in either knowing or recognizing spirits of the deceased that were fed during these rituals. Furthermore, with their examples of intra-kin rebirths, doglas emphasized their knowledge of spirits – if not of ancestors, then of directly related kin. Thus, I argue that in Nickerie’s dogla discourse people’s relation to the spirit world depended on what spiritual embodiments they had learned or chosen to nourish and cultivate.

The answer to the question of spiritual selectiveness in Nickerie’s dogla discourse, I suggest, lies in the inherent ambiguity of dogla discourse in Nickerie as presented throughout this thesis. This competing and interacting discourse located practically all social encounters between people in Nickerie in the historically created framework of ethnic categories – in which doglas had no place (Chapter One). At the same time, it evoked a strong denial of that same framework. In dogla discourse, there were ethnic political parties, but also political ideologies for changing the status quo (Chapter Two); ethnic neighbourhoods which shared an overarching value of dwelling in a common socio-geographical space (Chapter Three); ethnic ways of living, and an overcoming of cultural aversions against “mixed” families (Chapter Four); racialized bodies both stressing and undoing stereotypical ideas of ‘purity’ and ‘impurity’ (Chapter Five); and, as we have seen in this chapter, ethnically exclusionary ideas of spirit possession that nonetheless made room for cultural beliefs about spirits and death ritual practice in which ethnicity was irrelevant. As I have tried to demonstrate in all six chapters, the ambiguities in Nickerie’s dogla discourse point to the interdependency of concepts of essentialism and constructivism, of concepts of ethnicity and hybridity.

Conclusions

On my way to the University of Edinburgh one day, a postcard in the window of the Word Power bookstore caught my attention. The card's message was a black word on a white background that was not simply a word. Read one way it said "liberty"; read upside down, it said "slavery" (see Figure 22).

Figure 22: Liberty/Slavery Postcard



Source: Gathered Images⁴¹

The image on this card is a symbol that represents two seemingly oppositional concepts, but it also suggests that the one cannot exist without the other. What struck me most about this postcard is that there is a world contained in these words; that there are concrete realities contained within – or perhaps hidden by – the terms 'slavery' and 'liberty', as much as there are in the terms 'ethnicity' and 'hybridity'. As I have argued in this thesis, ethnicity and hybridity oppose but create one another.

⁴¹Image of postcard retrieved from <http://gatheredimages.com/DIRECT/POSTCARDS.html> [accessed 21 January 2013]

Alonso asked: “What is the relation between common sense categories of experience and analytical concepts developed in order to understand the processes that produce such categories and affect their taken-for-grantedness?” (1994: 379). In Nickerie this relation was difficult to discern. The ways in which people categorized themselves and each other along ethnic boundaries took me by surprise. According to Ira Bashkow, Boasian anthropologists “recognized that the boundaries they drew as analysts were not equivalent to the boundaries that people drew for themselves” (2004: 447). In Nickerie, however, people referred to ethnicity (*etniciteit*) not unlike Dutch sociologists and historians writing about ethnicity in Suriname: *etniciteit* was an empirical, or at least discursive, reality. This does not mean, of course, that the *emic* and *etic* conflate. ‘Dogla discourse’ – and my argument that doglas both shored up and destabilized ethnic essentialism – was not a folk concept. But in Nickerie’s dogla discourse, ethnicity *was* a local concept; something that was empirically created, moulded, questioned, yet adhered to unabatedly.

During the process of writing the thesis I came across a published interview with Brackette Williams. In this interview she aptly notes that “categories are alive” (Durão and Bastos 2012: 189):

There is a way in which categories just start talking to one another and you don’t have a human conversation going on anymore. And I think in Guyana I found that conversation. It had had some bloody results, but it was calming down at that time. But it was still very much categories and concepts talking to one another, embodied, walking, talking, even sometimes boogying and having a good time. Everything was categoric identity, categoric thought.

As Williams found in Guyana, Nickerie also presented a field in which “[e]verything was pretty much identified by some ethnic category either by joking or seriously” (ibid. 189-90). Along with colonialism in Suriname came a language with which people explicitly differentiated between themselves and each other in terms of *etniciteit* or, often signifying the same phenomenon, *ras* (race). Of course, as VanValkenburgh noted in his discussion of Bakhtinian and Latourian concepts of hybridity, “Language ... conceals as it reveals, enshrouding ... as it makes visible” (VanValkenburgh 2013: 316).

It was critical to me, however, that this language I encountered in Nickerie was more than words, more than categories alone. I understood it as part of a wider discourse that both obscured and opened up underlying realities of how people related to each other socially. *Etniciteit* was part of the local, everyday discourse I encountered in Nickerie. Furthermore, colonial encounters had enabled categorical thinking not just through words, it had also caused people to experience or ‘sense’ a differentiation between themselves and others in profound, perhaps even irreversible ways.

In this thesis, I have tried to capture those moments of fieldwork through which this discourse was communicated by and about doglas in Nickerie. Expanding on Baumann’s (1996, 1999) idea of “dual discursive competence”, I have tried to understand what it means to be dogla in Nickerie through what I termed ‘dogla discourse’. Dogla discourse presents the ambiguity of categorical reproduction and deconstruction in the context of Suriname’s ethnic essentialism.

Baumann’s (1996, 1999) notion of “dual discursive competence” has served as primary point of departure in my conceptualization of Nickerie’s ‘dogla discourse’. What surprises me, however, is that Baumann posits dominant essentialist discourse and “demotic” flexible discourse as a *duality*, as each other’s metaphorical sparring partners, whilst expressing reluctance to engage with hybridity and the conceptual idea of the boundary. Working against Baumann’s rather denigrating reference to anti-essentialism as “a cult which worships ‘hybridity’ or ‘border zones’ for their own sakes” (1996:204), dogla discourse in Nickerie presented essentialist and constructivist approaches to ethnicity not as diverging paradigms, but as paradigms in dialogic relation. This relation worked along the boundaries where ethnicity and hybridity interact, and thus shape each other. I suggest that in questioning both *emic* and *etic* concepts of boundaries and hybridity we can try to understand the ways in which people categorize and are categorized.

According to Bashkow there has been a “longstanding theoretical impasse over cultural boundaries” in anthropology, with cultural boundaries being “a leading target of anthropological critique” (2004: 443). In his discussion of Neo-Boasian

ideas in anthropology, Bashkow noted that despite Boas' critics insisting that "the commonsense notion of definite, stable, and natural boundaries is problematic", Boas did not view cultural boundaries as impermeable dividing lines closing cultures off from external influences (2004: 443). Furthermore, even if it is "problematic", it is unlikely that we can therefore get rid of the concept of the boundary. Indeed, as Stuart Hall put it, "the deconstructive approach puts key concepts 'under erasure' ... [but] the line which cancels them, paradoxically, permits them to go on being read" (1996: 1). Furthermore, as Bashkow claims, boundaries can also be conceived of as enabling rather than restrictive:

[boundaries] serve expressive, contrastive functions in culture. They are meaningful even where they are arbitrary, socially consequential even where they are crossed. [...] [W]e readily equate bounded culture with problematic essentialism, even though boundaries offer the sole basis for constructing entities in a nonessentialist way. (ibid. 444, 455)

I suggest that the concept of cultural (or ethnic) boundaries deserves renewed – or continued – anthropological attention. Boundaries not only demarcate culture, and ethnicity, but also allow for their flexibility, as Barth (1969) convincingly argued. Unlike Baumann, I see an explicit role for the notion of 'the hybrid' in explaining this conundrum. I argue that hybridity permits essentialism and vice versa. As I noted in the Introduction, with reference to Latour (1993), purity cannot exist without a notion of impurity, which in turns strengthens the difference between what is conceived of as pure and impure. This suggests that our analytical distinctions or boundary-making between concepts of purity and impurity, of ethnicity and hybridity – or, for that matter, between the concepts of slavery and liberty – is dialogic rather than oppositional.

Exploring hybridity in a context of ethnic essentialism, this thesis has tried to show how persistent thinking in terms of ethnic difference was expressed but also denied in Nickerie's dogla discourse. I have demonstrated how dogla discourse fused and confused essentialist ethnic categories in its insistent hybridity, but also vice versa. As much as doglas disturbed ethnic boundaries, they also highlighted ethnic categorizations by portraying these as representing fixed, delineated groups of

people. My central argument that rings throughout this thesis is that dogla discourse both materialized and transcended Suriname's ethnic essentialism.

Why, I asked, were doglas "not really ethnic" and what did this say about how ethnicity was understood in Nickerie? The chapters, each in their own ways, have tried to communicate that in this social setting where ethnic boundaries were constantly stressed and reaffirmed, doglas did not simply represent a blurry category but rather exposed an ontological complexity of 'the ethnic' as noun coupled with an adjectival sense of ethnicity as experience. As I noted in the Introduction, anthropologists usually understand ethnicity in terms of experience, as people's identification with or attribution to a group whose boundaries and content can be made and remade historically, geographically, used instrumentally, stigmatized politically; an identification, in short, that is constructed. In other words, ethnicity is something that is not fixed but context-dependent; it implies movement, fluidity rather than determination.

Dogla discourse in Nickerie recognized such fluidity. However, doglas were also described as "not really ethnic", which implies an understanding of ethnicity as a noun, as a categorical identity rather than as a tool with which to categorize people. In Nickerie people were not only 'being dogla' in their attributed looks and behaviour, they were further conceived of as lacking an ethnicity that others were thought to possess. This understanding of 'the ethnic' as noun is different from analytical usage of ethnicity in anthropology. Richard Jenkins said, for instance, that "neither culture nor ethnicity are 'things' that people 'have'. They are, rather, complicated repertoires which people experience, use, learn and 'do' in their daily lives, upon which they draw for a sense of themselves and an understanding of their fellows" (1996: 819). In Nickerie, however, ethnicity *was* understood as something people did or did not 'have'. This use of the term was most strikingly apparent in the ways in which doglas were differentiated on the basis of "not really" having or possessing ethnicity which, as I showed in Part II of this thesis, endowed or stereotyped people with ethnic ways of "knowing how to live life best" (Chapter Four), with racialized bodies (Chapter Five), and with "ethnic spirits" (Chapter Six).

But even if ethnicity was understood as something people ‘had’ – and doglas did not, or “not really” – it did not always dominate their social identities. As I argued in Chapter Three, shared identifications with certain spaces in Nickerie made ethnicity seem irrelevant. People in Nickerie experienced ‘their’ mosquitoes as something that pulled them together, and that differentiated them from people in Paramaribo who did not share that experience. Furthermore, people were proud of ‘their’ Nickerie hospital and although illness was not enjoyed, the hospital functioned as shared space where people could comfortably gossip ‘as Nickerians’ rather than as ‘having ethnicity’.

However, people’s experience of mosquitoes and hospital spaces, and their sharing of “ethnic food” at birthday parties, did not mean an interruption of ethnic categories. Ethnicity did not cease to be important, but was dominated by an extra category of ‘us, here’, regionally. Relating to Nickerie as a place of belonging did not mean that people could not also identify with, say, being dogla, a schoolboy, and also a good runner. Identities are intersectional in some ways. According to Gloria Wekker, “everyone is situated on a number of important axes of societal meaning, such as gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality and nationality” (2001b: 26). Identities are not only centralized in crosspoints of multiple identifications, however, but also - as I tried to show in Chapter Three – rotate their relevance according to context. With this chapter I have not been trying to dismiss the relevance of ethnic boundaries altogether, but to problematize these by arguing that there were contexts in which life in Nickerie was not about these boundaries. Ethnic identities were not irrelevant in space per se, but made irrelevant in the way people experienced shared spaces over ethnic spaces in practices of everyday life.

Even in the context of a political structure of ethnic essentialism, people in Nickerie acknowledged the context-dependency of ethnic categorization. The historically ethnicized framework of ethnic party politics was of course not easily ignored. A political statement like “vote for people who look like you” was an immediate expression of a political structure in which people were mobilized along ethnic

terms. However, as I have shown in Chapter Two with my analysis and discussion of the national elections of 25 May 2010, Surinamese politics is not simply about ethnic categories. Indeed, the way people in Nickerie voted and talked about the elections indicates the persistent struggles of coming to terms with a colonial legacy of economic and political dependence, and ways of trying to overcome this legacy in the process of 'independent' nation-building. Douglas explicitly exposed postcolonial questions about the role of ethnicity in definitions of the national, by opposing the twentieth century status quo of Unity in Diversity and *Apanjaht* politics in favour of the controversial election of President Bouterse.

As I have been arguing throughout this thesis, Douglas lead lives that are complicated in both the making and maintenance of ethnic boundaries and the disruption of these boundaries. They do not simply overcome or reduce these boundaries, but also emphasize and reaffirm them through their very definition of in-betweenness. As Peter Wade puts it: "Each allusion to mixture necessarily makes reference to the original components of the mixture" (2005: 245). For Douglas identity to make sense, there needs to be a strong contrast in those things they are 'in between'. In Chapter Four, I noted how Hindustanis and Creoles, taken as different bounded groups, set each other off, using ethnic stereotypes that were most clearly articulated in domains of sexuality and ethnic gender roles. Douglas, seemingly trapped in between, became the point at which these boundaries were pulled up.

The category of the mixed child actually firmed up the boundaries for non-mixed people. I noted in the Theoretical Framework that in the colonial period mixed children were thought of as a threat to the plantation hierarchy of dominant white bosses versus subjugated black workers (Martinez-Alier 1974; Stoler 1995b). As an in-between category, mixed children embodied both "the fluidity and fixity with which distinctions are drawn" (Stoler 1995a: xxvi). In Suriname, the colonial categories of black-white mixture merged into a single ethnic category referred to as Creole. Douglas discourse, however, does something curious to the idea of race-mixture. Whereas it does not deny that Creoles might be a black-white mix, Douglas discourse 'purifies' Creoles as an Afro-Surinamese category in opposition to a 'pure' Hindustani or Indo-Surinamese category; it constructs homogeneous categories

despite the internal diversity in each group, such as religious diversity (Reddock 1999) but also, importantly, socio-economic diversity (see below).

Doglas represent a boundary that ethnically divides Creole and Hindustani people. As I have shown in several chapters, this boundary is highly politicized. More specifically, this ethnic boundary contrasts Creoles and Hindustanis not necessarily on the basis of religion or socio-economic class, but also on the basis of race. Of course, we need to be careful with speaking of race as being the basis of something else because it is usually the other way around: “race stands often as a symbol for other differences” (Martinez-Alier 1974: 6). Indeed, as Sheriff notes:

Racism, as so many scholars have cogently demonstrated, is fundamentally rooted in processual class structures, historically shifting modes of production, distribution, and consumption, and, increasingly, in the unequal exchanges that tie local political economies to the global processes of capitalism. (2001: 8)

Sheriff – and the “many scholars” she refers to – presents an understanding of racism here that can directly be traced back to the colonial legacy of transatlantic slavery and the interrelated European economic expansion. I agree that colonial racism and its legacy are intrinsically related to socio-economic inequalities.

Relevant to my case study of doglas in Suriname, however, is that colonial racism in the Caribbean has been accompanied by another form of racism: one that is derived from the Hindu idea of caste hierarchy (see my Theoretical Framework). Dogla discourse shows how racism in Suriname can and does manifest itself also without a direct link to socio-economic inequality. Of course, the original Indian caste structure is based on perceived differences in human value in relation to the type of labour people (have to) perform, and its associated levels of wealth or poverty, of power and subordination. In the Surinamese context, however, the socio-economic class variation among Creoles and Hindustanis is increasingly greater within than between these groups (ABS 2005). As Ad de Bruijne observed, “ethnicity plays a larger role in the stratification of Suriname’s society than socioeconomic background” (2001: 38). In this thesis I have shown that the ways in which Creoles and Hindustanis pit

themselves against each other is a complex one, but it is certainly not devoid of racism. In Nickerie, racist behaviour was questioned, denied, but also emphasized, particularly in people's ideas about mixed-race (see also England 2008; Reddock 2014).

In her analysis of various cultural forms through which people express and negotiate "Caribbean community identity ... imagine[d] ... as a community of equals", Shalini Puri convincingly relates diverging Indian and African attitudes to race-mixing to ideological state projects (2004: 12). Puri makes a well-reasoned claim for "dougla poetics" as political solution to a national equality that has the potential to override racial tensions in Trinidad (see also my Theoretical Framework). As Rhoda Reddock observes, however:

In the ethnicized political context of Trinidad and Tobago, it has often been stated – in venues ranging from political platforms to annual calypso festivals – that *douglas* hold the key to a more 'harmonious' society or 'national unity.' So far, however, there has been no coalescing of *douglas* into a social or political category whose members could consciously act as a buffer between the two main ethnic groups. (2014: 64)

Indeed, in Caribbean nationalisms ideologies of mixedness (hybridity) run alongside ideologies stressing purity (ethnic essentialism). As Sarah England observes: "In Trinidad ... mixing is simultaneously celebrated as bringing the nation together and as threatening to disrupt its 'separate but equal' cultural pluralism" (2008: 3). Likewise, in Suriname the ideology of unity in diversity has been competing with the ideology of a dogla nation.

However, as Peter Wade suggests, "the discourse of national homogenisation includes within itself complementary discourses of differentiation" (2005: 245). The fact that there was a specific term for Creole-Hindustani hybridity – 'dogla' – indicates reluctance about a fluidity of ethnic boundaries. In Suriname's classificatory context of ethnic essentialism, doglas presented themselves and were presented by others as an anomalous category. Doglas were, in Butler's (1993) terminology, the "constitutive outside" against which caricatured ethnic identities could be framed. Like Hall said:

[I]dentities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the ‘positive’ meaning of any term – and thus its ‘identity’ – can be constructed. (1996: 4-5)

While stressing the constructed-ness of ethnic categories, dogla discourse did not prevent people from using ethnic, even explicitly racialized, referents. Doglas both contested and affirmed Suriname’s ethnic categories. Moreover, doglas seemed aptly aware of this seeming contradiction. My friend Ella had a superb understanding of it, telling me:

Sometimes our thoughts are black and white, even if reality is grey, or purple, or rainbow. But if you believe that everything just depends on how people deal with things in that broader perspective, then reality will strike back at you in black and white.

The ethnographic examples in this thesis have sought to highlight the inherent contradictions of cultural reification in the politicization of ethnicity in Suriname. Effectively, the abstract category of people referred to as ‘dogla’ opens up a plethora of cultural experience cutting across, through and beyond presumably ‘pure’ ethnic boundaries. Yet, despite the cultural multiplicity doglas represent and continuously negotiate, the idea of ethnic differentiation seemed to continue unabated. Indeed, the strongest, least-questioned assumption in dogla discourse in Nickerie seemed to be that of ‘ethnic purity’. As we have seen throughout this thesis, dogla discourse identified doglas as ‘impure’ in a starkly categorical framework of ‘pure’ ethnic groups.

Simultaneously, or precisely because of this presumed ‘ethnic impurity’, doglas introduced an uncertainty to the belief that clear-cut ethnic differentiation was possible in Surinamese society. Yet even doglas themselves did not seem to contest this idea. By referring to spirits as “ethnic” – and by excluding themselves from this category by saying that they were unlikely to be affected by spirit possession *because of their mixed-ness* – doglas effectively attributed factuality to the assumption that ethnic purity exists in Suriname. In other words, doglas appeared to confirm ethnic

boundaries by assuming an in-between position. A self-understanding of being in-between involves an acknowledgement of something(s) you are not quite 'in', just as the idea of an "ethnic mix" relies on an assumption that there are ethnic differences in the first place.

However, what I have tried to show in this thesis is that dogla discourse was not so clearly dualistic. Indeed, despite its acceptance of 'the pure ethnic' and of 'dogla impurity', dogla discourse stressed ambiguity, even contradiction. Impurity was not simply a rational category of not-pure, but a highly emotive expression of dialogical creations of difference, as well as of self. Indeed, as Butler insightfully explains:

When the 'I' seeks to give an account of itself, it can start with itself, but it will find that this self is already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration; indeed, when the 'I' seeks to give an account of itself, an account that must include the conditions of its own emergence, it must, as a matter of necessity, become a social theorist. The reason for this is that the 'I' has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation – or set of relations – to a set of norms. (2005: 7-8)

What echoes throughout this thesis is that dogla discourse called upon the relationship between the interior and the exterior, between people and their community, in forming dialogical selves. It was about the boomerang dialogue in which self is shaped not only against but also *with* others. From a dialogical point of view, the questions this thesis has addressed – questions of 'who am I (not)' and 'where do I (not) belong' – experienced through categorical, political and spatial identifications in a context of postcolonial nation-building, through family and sexual relations as well as through racialized and spiritual embodiments – are both societal experiences and personal ones. In dogla discourse, these questions were addressed in a dialogue between self and other, framing the phenomenon 'dogla' itself as a dialogical identity. It may be in these dialogical creations that the difference between the internal and the external gets both stressed and blurred, that fluidity and fixity interact – generating 'dogla identity' as a result.

'Being dogla' in Nickerie, then, can be perceived as a dialogical identity communicating between the interior and exterior, between the self and the other.

Doglas are never just hybrid, never just ethnic, but emphasize both in a dual or rather “multivoiced” (Bakhtin 1981) discursive context. As such, ‘dogla’ forms a conceptual boundary that distinguishes ethnicity and hybridity. What this thesis contributes to discussions of ethnicity and hybridity, then, is that the conceptual boundary between these concepts can itself be perceived as the “constitutive outside” (Butler 1993; Hall 1996) that frames them both. In Nickerie’s dogla discourse, ‘dogla’, conceived of as that boundary between ethnicity and hybridity, is that “constitutive outside”, but also *constitutive of both*.

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